

The Proposal



MV KASI

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by
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DESCRIPTION

Nandini Mahasena has to marry within two weeks. If she didn't marry the man her parents had chosen, they would lose everything.

Nandini wasn't willing to sacrifice her life for the sake of paying off her father's gambling debts. And the groom, while handsome and very successful, was not the kind her parents would ever pick under ideal circumstances. In fact, he would be the most unsuitable groom since he didn't have the necessary pedigree of a long line of royal ancestors. But something about the groom's proposal touched Nandini's heart.

Will Nandini agree to marry the man her parents had picked? Find out in
—The Proposal

CHAPTER 1

"I am not marrying a stranger! Let alone in two weeks time!"

"How can you be so selfish? Have you no consideration for your family? Don't you know we are in desperate need?"

"It's a two-way street, Ma. It cannot be just me who is making sacrifices all the time."

"Well, then sacrifice this one last time. We won't ask you for anything else again."

Nandini Mahasena sighed and massaged her temples to stop the oncoming headache that usually ensued after arguing with her mother.

She shouldn't have returned to her family home. But when she got the call that her father was sick and was almost on death bed, she came to visit him.

Big mistake.

Her father was fine. Nandini's parents had lied to her.

"*Nandu...*" There was a knock on the door followed by Nandini's older sister calling out her name.

"Come in, Meena. The door is open."

The door opened and Meenakshi peeked inside before tentatively stepping in.

Each time, Nandini saw her older sister, it broke her heart. Meenakshi, who was only four years older than Nandini, had been a high-spirited girl.

Before marriage, Meenakshi was a skilled, budding artist. Some of her paintings had even been featured in exclusive art exhibitions and festivals. Meenakshi was also an expert horse-woman. But all of those accomplishments disappeared once Meenakshi got married. Because apparently, women with royal blood in their veins, were not supposed to work or even remotely participate in vulgar public displays.

To the hell with that!

Nandini looked at the beautiful painting on the bedroom wall that Meenakshi had painted. It was a painting of a girl being wooed by her lover. The emotions, the colors and all the finer details added to the richness of the painting. But all their family and Meenakshi's late husband had seen was a half-naked woman frolicking with a half-naked man.

These days, Meenakshi painted landscapes or still figures that adorned the walls of their crumbling mansion.

"Ma asked me to come, Nandini. She wants me to talk to you."

Nandini's mother was looking at her with a victorious look. She knew Nandini would listen to her older sister. And the fact that her older sister who lived an hour's ride away, took the time to visit, meant it was serious.

Nandini shook her head. "Come on, Meena. Not you, too. They want me to marry some random stranger! Only because he offered to bail out our lazy father from filing bankruptcy in exchange for my hand in marriage."

"Nandu, Papa is in trouble. He might lose everything."

"Whose fault is that?" Nandini snapped. "Has he worked for even a day in his life? All he has done is live in the so-called past glory of our ancestors. Even when he got several opportunities to convert our crumbling mansion to a hotel and make a good income, he always balked. How long did he think he could continue to live off the money made from selling our heirlooms?"

Nandini's mother looked as though she wanted to add something in defense of her husband, but she wisely kept quiet.

"I know you are right," Meenakshi said softly. "But for my sake, can you please just agree to see the man this evening, if not agree to marry him?"

Nandini stared at the beseeching look on her sister's face.

"Fine," Nandini said grudgingly. "I'll see the man."

Nandini's mother held a victorious look as though she knew Nandini would eventually agree.

CHAPTER 2

“You look like a real princess, Aunt Nandini.”

Nandini looked at her cute ten-year-old niece watching Nandini being dolled-up to be paraded in front of a man in a few minutes.

“Thank you, Anjali. You look like a princess, too.”

Anjali beamed.

The door to the bedroom opened. “They are here. Is she ready, yet?” Nandini’s mother asked impatiently.

“Yes. I’m ready, Ma,” replied Nandini in a sarcastic tone. “Heard the man’s parents own jewelry stores. Let’s just hope none of the groom’s family recognizes I’m wearing fake jewelry.”

Nandini’s mother looked worried as she eyed the jewelry on her daughter. Nandini’s father had sold last of the family heirlooms to pay for his gambling debts. But hypocrite that he was, he first had the exact replicas of the hundreds-of-years-old jewelry done so his wife and daughters could continue to flaunt them in public.

“The groom’s parents didn’t come. It’s just him for now,” Nandini’s mother replied.

“I see. Much easier for me then,” Nandini replied. Before she received a warning about behaving, “Let’s go,” said Nandini, raising her ornate lehanga by a few inches and sweeping out of the room.

When she reached half-way down the stairs, she realized that only her mother and niece accompanied her. “Where’s Meena?” she asked her mother with a frown.

“Your sister is a widow. She’s not allowed to come for an auspicious occasion.”

“You must be joking!” Nandini snapped. “Either Meena stays next to me or I go back to my room.”

Nandini’s mother looked like she wanted to argue, but seeing her younger daughter’s stubborn look, she budged. Meenakshi was called.

“Meena, I want you to stay next to me.”

“Nandu, it’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. And I insist.”

“Ok. Let’s go,” Meena said softly and they went down the dramatic staircase that still stood strong within the crumbling mansion.

As soon as Nandini entered the large formal living room, she felt the eyes

of the people already seated in the room watching her. Her skin broke out in goosebumps when her eyes met with that of a tall man, watching her in a slow perusal. By the time he was done taking in the details such as her hair styled in loose curls, her bright red lehanga and the ornate jewelry, Nandini's face held an outraged fury.

"Do you like what you see? Or do you want me to turn, so you can see my backside, too? And maybe my teeth, too," she asked.

"Nandini!" her father snapped.

The man didn't look embarrassed. In fact he was smiling at her. "I've already seen you before from a distance, Miss Mahasena. Unless I missed out on a tail or a set of horns, you still look as beautiful as I remember."

Nandini narrowed her eyes at his comeback.

"My daughter can be a little impulsive and hot-headed at times, Rajeev. But most of the time, she's very amicable to everyone," Nandini's father quickly added. He then looked at Nandini. "This is Rajeev Raheja. His family owns the Raheja group of jewelry stores across India. He pursued his higher education abroad before returning to India to take care of his family business."

"I also have several other companies that I started on my own, Miss. Mahasena. One of the main reasons I wanted to pick you as my bride was because you are similarly inclined towards business such as me. I heard you own a company that is running successfully."

"How very practical and smart of you, Mr. Raheja," Nandini replied. "But don't you think it's much cheaper to hire a handful of able managers to run your businesses, rather than spend a fortune in buying a bride who may or may not choose to support you after marriage?" She looked at her father, who looked like he might burst a blood vessel. "By the way, how much are you paying my father?"

"Nandini!"

"It's, okay, Mr. Mahasena," said Rajeev before looking at her. "I've agreed to pay most of your father's debt, Miss. Mahasena."

"Wow," she said with a bitter look directed at her father. "That's quite generous. I don't know if I should be flattered you thought I was worth that much or I should be insulted that my rigid father is willing to give up on his so-called-*ideals* and sell his daughter for that price." She turned to look at the man who was watching her with an expressionless look. "No offense, Mr. Raheja. My father only agreed to this match because of your money. If he

wasn't in desperate need for money, he wouldn't even allow you to step into our *mansion*, let alone consider a family of traders to be his in-laws. He actually chose an immoral, wastrel from a higher class as his son-in-law than allowing my sister to marry a man she loved."

Nandini felt bad when she saw her sister flinch. But Nandini couldn't draw back her words. She wanted to put the point across.

"Well, I guess I'm lucky that your father is in such need," Rajeev said softly. "Or I wouldn't be marrying you."

"I haven't agreed to marry you, Mr. Raheja."

"Nandini!" Nandini's mother snapped.

"I've agreed to only see him, not marry him. I can pick my own life partner."

There was silence.

"I would like to speak with Miss Mahasena alone." Rajeev Raheja's tone was firm when he placed the request.

Nandini's father and mother exchanged looks, before they nodded. They threw Nandini a warning glare and went out of the room. Meena also left with them. But Nandini knew her parents would be near enough to be able to listen to the conversation.

Nandini felt Rajeev Raheja's gaze completely focused on her. "Do you have someone in mind you want to pick as a life partner, Miss Mahasena?"

Nandini tuned and met Rajeev's gaze. "And if I do?"

Rajeev smiled. Nandini could see the slight challenge in his eyes. "I'm used to working hard and achieving whatever I want, Nandini. I guess I'll have to impress you and convince you to pick me as your groom than someone else."

Nandini's heart skipped a beat. She let her annoyance show on her face to compensate for the thrill she felt listening to his words. "I'm not a business deal, Mr. Raheja for you to achieve."

There was another slow perusal of her. "Oh, I can assure you this is purely a pleasure. There is no business involved."

Nandini's cheeks heated. "You know what I meant," she snapped.

There was another leisurely smile. Nandini felt a flutter in her stomach.

"Just so you know, Mr. Raheja, I would make a terrible wife by most men's standards. I am opinionated, sometimes stubborn, and I also have a terrible temper that I let loose at times."

Rajeev Raheja's smile didn't waver. "So, in other words, you have a brain

of your own to make your decisions with, and you stick to your beliefs no matter what, and you like showing how you feel rather than toe the line. I quite like that in a woman and it is even better to have a wife with those qualities. It makes one's life more exciting."

Listening to him twist her words and put a positive spin on her flaws, made Nandini even more determined. "Don't try to make it seem like there's anything deeper in this proposal, Mr. Raheja. You only saw me and decided to marry me. It can't get more superficial than that."

"Never heard of love at first sight, Nandini?"

Nandini let out an inelegant snort. It only made him smile.

"Is there something you want to know about me?" he asked.

"No, thank you. I'm sure my parents will fill my ears with enough information about you, trying to make me agree to marry you."

He let out a good-natured laugh.

"Just so you know, my father doesn't really respect you. He's only pretending to do so for your money."

Rajeev Raheja shrugged. "As long as he doesn't *show* his disrespect towards me or my family, I don't really care, Nandini. We can't always please everyone. And if your father is as narrow-minded as you said, then I don't even want to bother." His eyes held hers with an intense look. "I only care about your respect and support."

She felt strange warmth in her heart listening to his words. "I see," was all she said.

"Your father already gave me his word that you would be marrying me. But I want you to think and give me an answer, on whether or not you want to go ahead with my proposal."

Everything inside her was repulsed by the fact that her father was willing to sell her off like a piece of property in exchange for money. "I'll let my parents know about my decision soon. They'll reach out to you with my answer."

To his credit, Rajeev Raheja didn't demand that she be the one to tell him of her decision.

"Hoping to hear back soon, Nandini," he said with a smile. "And if you agree, I'll bring my parents to settle the date of our marriage."

Rajeev Raheja was jumping way, way ahead. But Nandini simply nodded.

CHAPTER 3

The entire week felt like a torture. Nandini's parents stalked her even when she tried to sleep in peace.

"He's so handsome and he looks like a movie star! How can you not find him good-looking?" Nandini's mother demanded.

"I never said he wasn't good-looking," Nandini replied. Rajeep Raheja was stunning to look at. He was the kind to turn women's heads wherever he went. "It's not all about looks, Ma. Even psychopaths and sadists can be very good-looking. That doesn't mean they are good husband material."

"He's not a psychopath or a sadist!"

"How do you know that?" Nandini snapped. "All you know is he has the right bank balance. You know nothing about his family."

"He comes from a hard-working family," Nandini's father added.

Nandini was shocked listening to him. "They are still a family of traders, Papa."

"Times have changed, Nandini." There was slight bitterness that escaped despite his put-on show. "People only give respect to a person's current position. It doesn't matter where that person's roots are from."

"Then how come you chose Raghav as Meena's husband? Just because he came from a high-born family? Despite knowing he was a wastrel with several bad habits, you pushed her into marrying him. How come I can't have a high-born husband? I rather wait until another high-born man wants to marry me."

There was a panic in her father's eyes. Nandini knew her father didn't have much time and he would lose everything if he didn't make the payment to the bank within a week.

"Forcing Meena to marry Raghav was a huge mistake. We don't want to repeat that mistake with you. We can see that Rajeep is a decent man."

Nandini stared at her mother and father who were watching her with desperation in their eyes.

"So you are okay if your grandchildren have a trader's blood running in their veins?" Nandini asked. "You might throw that fact at me or my children as an insult, each time we have an argument or something."

Her father visibly flinched, but he looked determined. "I'll never throw that as an insult. I'm more than okay. In fact I will announce it proudly that my in-laws come from a family line of successful traders."

“What about money?” Nandini demanded. “You want me to marry Rajeev Raheja because of what he can offer you now. What about later? When you gamble once again and rack up more debts? Will you demand money from my husband or family again?”

“No,” her father answered hurriedly. “I promise to never gamble again. Even if I do, I’ll never ask your husband or his family for money.”

“Your promises mean nothing, Papa,” Nandini stated bitterly.

“No. No. This time I mean it.”

Nandini studied his face for some time and sighed. “I will think about it,” she said.

Nandini’s parents looked ecstatic.

“Don’t get too excited,” Nandini warned. “I will think about it further tonight and give my answer tomorrow. But first, I want you to write down in a legal document that you will not gamble anymore and neither will you approach me or my family for borrowing any money in the future.”

Nandini’s father nodded his head vigorously. “I’ll have the lawyer put those conditions on a legal paper and sign them.”

“Fine.”

Until then, Nandini’s mother had been quiet. The moment, Nandini said she’d think about it, her mother stood taller. “While you *think* about it, just remember that if you don’t agree to the marriage, you won’t have a mother or father alive to torture! We’ll have to kill ourselves to avoid shame.”

With that dramatic ultimatum, Nandini’s mother, swept out from the bedroom, slamming the door shut on her way. Nandini’s father threw a worried look towards Nandini before following his wife.

Nandini sighed aloud. “What do you think, Meena?” she asked her older sister who had been standing quietly and watching the drama ensue.

“I think Papa and Ma want you to desperately marry Rajeev Raheja,” Meenakshi said softly.

CHAPTER 4

The wedding of Nandini Mahasena and Rajeev Raheja was going to be a simple occasion. Nandini had put her foot down and placed another stipulation that her wedding be a simple affair. The reception, however, that was planned by the groom's family was going to be grand occasion.

"You look radiant, Nandu," Meenakshi told her younger sister as she put the last of the jewelry. She recalled her own wedding eight years ago when she was forced to marry her late husband. At that time, her face was puffy and her eyes were almost swollen shut with grief.

"Thanks, Meena. I'm worried you are going to overshadow me. I told you this sari would suit you well. I'm glad I insisted."

Meenakshi smiled at her younger sister's exaggeration. Meenakshi saw her mother throwing disapproving looks. She knew what was going through her mother's mind. Her mother had told her many times that as a widow and mother of a child, Meenakshi should dress up accordingly. Not wear an ornate lehanga and wear beautiful jewelry and flowers like that of a bride.

Her thoughts were distracted when she heard the sounds of trumpets and drums, alerting everyone to the arrival of the groom.

Meenakshi went to the window and saw the groom seated on a horse and heading inside their mansion gates.

"I'm going to receive the groom. Will you be all right?" Meenakshi asked.

Nandini laughed. "Yes! I'm not going to run away before the wedding. I promise!"

Nandini's friends laughed with her. Some of them chose to join Meenakshi and her mother as they went down the mansion steps towards the huge lawn that was decorated in a simple, tasteful way for the ceremony.

Holding a silver plate filled with the tilak, flowers and the camphor, Meenakshi joined her mother to receive the groom.

As she approached the groom, Meenakshi's steps faltered. Her heart began to thud loudly in her ears.

No. It is impossible.

Although her mind kept repeating that it was impossible, the man standing next to the groom, watching her with a cold, intent look, said otherwise.

Meenakshi turned desperately towards her mother to see if her mother recognized the man.

Her mother was smiling amicably at the groom and everyone around the groom.

Oh God, please let me be imagining things.

Meenakshi's hands trembled as she held on to the silver tray like her life depended on it. She desperately looked around, praying even harder that Anjali wasn't close by.

God must have heard her prayers because Anjali was busy playing with her cousins at a distance.

Taking a deep, calming breath, Meenakshi forged on. She pasted a determined smile and covered the distance to the groom. Lighting the small fire, she completed the rest of the ritual of receiving the groom. All the while, she was aware of the burning gaze of the man watching her silently.

"Thank you, Meena," said Rajeev, smiling at her warmly.

"You are welcome," she said, smiling back at her soon-to-be brother-in-law. She knew her smile was slightly wobbly.

Before anyone else spoke to her, Meenakshi mumbled an excuse and ran back into the mansion.

She didn't go to the bride's room. Instead, she went to her childhood bedroom.

With shaking hands, she opened the curtains partially and looked down at the wedding party. She felt her face pale considerably when the man standing next to the groom was also looking towards the window she stood next to.

There were close to fifty windows on this side of the mansion, but the man was watching only this particular window. His eyes were trained on the very window he used to slide open before sneaking into her room since they were kids.

It was Hiten.

For the first time in her life, Meenakshi Mahasena fainted.

CHAPTER 5

The wedding ceremony completed without any major glitches.

Nandini's mother and father took her to the side before she left with the groom to his place.

"Nandu, I'm really sorry," said her father, hugging her and kissing her forehead. "I know I forced you to marry against your wishes for my sake. But Rajeev is really a nice boy. Please be a good wife to him."

Nandini was surprised by the rare, unexpected affection that her father showed towards her. Although, she didn't want to allow negative thoughts to enter her mind during the happiest day of her life, she still couldn't help but think that her father wanted her to be good to Rajeev, so he could continue to borrow money. But her father did sign the contract to not bother Rajeev or his family for any future loans. So she decided to give her father a benefit of doubt.

"I will, Papa," she said.

Soon, Nandini headed towards a decorated car. She hugged her older sister hard. "Thanks Meena, for everything," she said, her voice wavering slightly. "I'll call you soon."

Meenakshi gave her a tearful smile. "Be happy, Nandu. You deserve it."

Nandini knelt on the ground and hugged her niece next, promising to visit her often.

Even though Nandini had left home about five years ago and lived on her own, her heart still felt heavy as she left her childhood home.

When she sat in the car next to her husband, she felt his hand holding hers and squeezing it in reassurance.

She waved at everyone as the car drove away.

"You, okay, sweetheart?" her husband asked.

"Yes. I'm going to terribly miss my sister and my niece. I don't see them enough. Each time I visit my home, I realize how much I miss them both."

"Ask them to visit us."

She nodded and slowly rested her head against Rajeev's shoulder.

"You know I'm going to pay back the money you are giving my parents, right?" she reminded softly.

"I already told you that you don't have to, sweetheart."

"No. I want to. And it's only half of it that I'll be paying." The rest of it was being paid by Meena.

Rajeev picked her hand and kissed on her palm. “Nandini Raheja,” he said with pride in his voice. “We waited a long time for this day, my love. The way you went on and on with me last week, when I came to meet you in front of your parents, for a moment I felt like I was really a stranger to you and had come to ask for your hand in marriage.”

Nandini let out a laugh. She looked at the man she had been in love with for over three years. “I’m glad you had to sweat a little for winning my hand in marriage, Mr. Raheja,” she said with a mischievous grin.

He laughed and kissed her hand once again. “I’m glad your sister suggested this plan to you. Much easier than convincing your parents.”

Nandini grinned. “Me, too. You should have heard some of the things my parents said about you to convince me to marry you.” Nandini didn’t really care about convincing her parents as much as them respecting her choice of her life-partner. The main added bonus was getting it in writing that her father would stop borrowing money for gambling or other vices.

“You, my love, are devious.”

She smiled at her husband. “Of course, I am. But you love me.”

He laughed once again before kissing her tenderly on her lips. “Yes, I do. And I promised you a long time ago that I will always love you and cherish you.”

Sighing with happiness, Nandini looked forward to spending the rest of her life with the man who was her choice as well as her parents’ choice.

The End

COMING SOON...

Spanning over three decades, a gut-wrenching tale of passion, loss, retribution and redemption—an epic love story of Meenakshi and Hiten.

BLURB

The boy who had kissed her scraped knees better,
the boy who held her hand when she mourned the death of her favorite
pets,

the boy who gave her the first kiss,
and the boy who made her into a woman.

That boy was long gone.

In his place returned a man who was cold, vicious and unfeeling. He destroyed everything that stood in his path for retribution. And now, he was here to stake claim to everything she possessed.

(Note: This will be a standalone, full-length novel. The story is a retelling of the classic, ‘Wuthering Heights’ with a much-needed happily-ever-after ending.)

Enjoy the sample of the #1 Bestselling Romantic Suspense... THE CAPTIVE

DESCRIPTION

Nina Bhupati was a lucky woman. Her husband, a political figure and business tycoon, loved to keep her in the lap of luxury. Rich, handsome, and caring, he was also what most women dreamed of as an ideal husband.

But their fairy-tale life blew apart when Nina was kidnapped and held hostage.

Between the distraught husband who badly wanted her back, and the brutal, determined man who was bent upon shattering her soul, Nina must survive her days as—THE CAPTIVE.

--The Captor--

When he kidnapped her, all he expected was a weak, pampered rich woman. What she actually was completely different. She was a fighter, a survivor, a wily seductress, and a genuinely beautiful and giving soul who destroyed some of the darkness that lurked inside him. The more time he spent around her, the more he became addicted. And before he knew it— he was falling in love with the wife of his enemy...

--The Captive--

When she was taken, all she knew was that her captor was dangerous. He had snatched her from her fairytale life, so he could use her as a tool for his revenge. But each time she spoke to him, and spent time in his company, he made her heart feel things it shouldn't. Under the cold, hard and cruel layers, she saw the real man. Soon, the lines were beginning to blur between what was needed and what she actually wanted...

EXCERPT

Nina hated the wait.

She sat in the corner of the room with her back against the wall and her eyes trained on the door. She was sure her captor would return to torture her painfully for stabbing him in the arm.

She felt a crippling exhaustion in her body due to lack of sleep during the past few days of her captivity. Her head kept falling forward, trying to reach for the comfort of sleep. But each time it did, she jerked it back up, refusing

to give in to sleep, especially when she was at her most vulnerable.

She didn't know whether attacking him was a logical move. But when he had stalked her in a slow, unhurried manner, with menace radiating from his body, demanding his knife back, he had looked like a hunter who had cornered his prey. And she, his trembling, whimpering prey.

Her mind had instantly rebelled at the comparison of herself with a prey. She wasn't weak. She had never been weak. Even when the odds were heavily stacked against her, she had always fought back. So, not making it any exception, she had sliced his arm.

And now, the thought of what he could do to her was tearing her apart.

Will he come to her room tonight? And if he did, what would he do? Will he follow through his threats?

She thought about the video taken to send to Suraj. Her captor had spoken about the follow-up videos. She didn't have to guess about his intentions of what the later videos would contain.

Nina's thoughts threatened to take her into darkness to escape into a place where there would be no worry or fear.

Don't you dare give up!

She shivered and rubbed at her trembling arms as her mind ordered her not to give in to fear. But even as she talked herself into being brave, her heart almost stopped when the door to the room opened.

Her captor entered the room once again.

Amazon Link: www.smarturl.it/TheCaptive