

**LOGA VIRAHSAWMI**



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5, Edwin Ythier Street,

Rose Hill, 71368,

Mauritius.

[gonaz@intnet.mu](mailto:gonaz@intnet.mu)

*For Colleen Lowe Morna,*

*With love, admiration and gratitude*

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## **AMY DAWSON**

Dr. Indra Munga put her stereoscope on the table, took out her overall, and stretched her two arms at her back to release the tension of the day.

She was still stretching her arms when she heard the telephone. She just could not be bothered to answer. She was too tired. Her energy was at the lowest level after her strenuous day.

The telephone kept on ringing. "I am too upset to reply. I cannot do any talking after this long and difficult day. Doreen will know that she will have to deal with the patient herself", she told herself.

She was troubled by the traumatic experiences of one of her patients who had just left her surgery.

Doctor Munga had always known this patient as somebody with a good job, economically independent and drove her BMW Sedan with her initials on the car plate.

She was a young and beautiful woman with long blond silky hair. She was always well dressed in branded clothing with matching high heel shoes and matching handbag.

Dr. Munga could never have guessed that she was subject to violence in the hands of her husband. She showed no physical or emotional violence. Looking at her, nobody could have imagined that the lady was a silent victim. She had a beautiful body. Her perfect makeup, her branded outfits, shoes and jewelry could have made any woman envious. She appeared as a self-confident lady in control of her life. She had a very strong personality.

Amy Dawson was more than a patient to her Doctor.

Doctor Munga always found a few minutes to talk to her after the medical examination. She often told her Doctor how when she accompanied her husband to official cocktails and dinner parties, all eyes were on them. They were congratulated by the other guests. Some would say, "What a great matching couple?" or "How come you always turn out so well. You really look like a fantastic couple always in love with each other," or "Do you consult each other before you choose what to wear as you seem to be always on the same theme for your outfits?"

Amy Dawson and her husband Ben Richard were two well-known professionals. They both graduated from Glasgow

University, Scotland. Amy was the Manager of a law company while her husband was the Chief Executive Officer of a Bank. But on that day when Amy Dawson asked for an urgent appointment, the secrets and lies of Amy Dawson's private life between the four walls of her house came to light.

The beating and the punch Amy got right in her face made her lose control. She rolled down the stairs and she hit a table before falling on the ground. The crystal vase they got as a wedding gift fell on the corridor tiles and broke into pieces. Contrary to the crystal vase, Amy was not broken to pieces and did not have any broken bones. She tried to get up by gripping to the table. She was very shaky and felt she would lose control of her body if she did not concentrate on how to get up. She froze for a minute and her mind stopped working. She felt dizzy and sat on the floor.

Her husband who was standing at the top of the stairs just looked at her. He made no effort to help his wife. He then ran down the stairs, reached for his car key that was hanging on a hook near the front door, looked at Amy on the floor, insulted her, opened the front door, closed it with a big bang and left. After a few minutes Amy slowly stood up by lifting one leg at a time and holding tight on her arms. The aerobic classes that she did regularly came to her rescue and she could stand on her feet. Everything was confusing. It took her at least five minutes to decide that she should do something.

The first person that came to her mind for help was her mother. They were very close and met at least once a month

for a mother and daughter lunch in either Edinburgh or in Glasgow where her mother lived.

On second thought she dropped the idea and thought to ask her only brother, older than her by two years, to come to her rescue and to take her to the hospital. Her brother had his own law company, a beautiful family with two small children at pre-primary school. Amy thought it would have been difficult for his brother to take a train or drive all the way from Glasgow to meet his sister in Edinburgh. But being so close to his sister he would have done it but Amy had second thoughts. Furthermore, there was no point in lying to her family and tell them that she fell down the stairs. Her brother was a criminal lawyer, her father was a judge and her mother had a degree in law. Not only it would not have taken them long to know what had happened to Amy, they would also report a criminal case and decide for legal actions against Ben Richard, their son in law.

## **AMY AND BEN**

The Dawsons, as well as their friends and other professionals in this high-class society, always thought that Amy and Ben were the perfect couple. A model to be followed by young couples.

Amy and Ben became madly in love while at University. They did not think of social status or different family backgrounds. Amy came from a rich and well learned family who lived in a

mansion in Glasgow. Ben, on the other hand, came from a working-class family, had a very modest life in a two-bedroom house with a tiny garden.

Ben's father was a truck driver and his mother a home maker. His dad was, quite often, absent for long periods when he had to deliver goods outside Glasgow. But Ben's mother looked after her son really well doing the job of both mum and dad. Being the only child, he got the best of everything and was spoilt by his parents. His father always brought something special for him when he returned home after a long absence. They went to Church together. After church they sat down together for Sunday lunches of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding when dad was at home.

Ben's mother had made herself a reputation in being the best cook in her region. Neighbours and friends went to her place to learn how to make her great variety of pies, rolls and different pastries including bread. She made her own jam and marmalade from seasonable fruits that she bought in the open market. She also bought her vegetables and meat from the open market on specials days when business was on. Whenever she cooked something, she kept the best part for her son. Ben's dad did not mind when he saw his wife giving the best pork or lamb chops to his son. "He is a growing child and must eat well otherwise he won't be able to study. Furthermore, he is a great sportsperson and needs stamina," Ben's father very proudly used to say.

His parents were proud of him. He was a high flyer. Did well in all his subjects. Always a winner and got quite a few prizes for his academic performances and sports achievements. He was known in Glasgow as the best goal keeper they had ever had. He had never lost a single match. He played for the national football team.

Amy too was the pride of her parents. Apart from her academic excellence, Amy's hobby was dancing and music. She was a passionate ballet dancer and avid of classical music. With its aesthetics and rigorous techniques of classical ballet, Amy turned out to have a beautiful figure that could make any star envious.

The Dawsons knew that their daughter was going out with Ben Richard. Amy, very often, borrowed her mum's car when she had to go out with Ben in the evening.

Ms Dawson did not have any objection as Amy was a careful driver and a responsible young lady. Amy had her own keys to the gate and stayed in her fully furnished and self-contained flat at the back of the main house.

It did not come as a surprise the day Amy announced that she was engaged to Ben and showed them her golden ring mounted with a small zircon. Ben gave her the ring during a romantic dinner and said "Amy I would like you to be my wife. I will care and protect you until I die. Please accept this ring as a token of our love. In my heart this zircon is more precious than a diamond. I hope it will never leave your finger."



The Dawsons did not have any objection to this relationship although they were miles apart in terms of social background. They knew that Ben was a high flyer and had made himself a reputation in sports. They had very often seen him play, read about him in the print media, heard him on radio and saw him on television. Nearly every week his pictures appeared in the sports page of the mainstream media.

Looking at the ring, Judge Dawson told his daughter, “all we wish is your happiness. We can see that you love Ben. The most important thing for us is that you know what you are doing. We have given you education, love, care, support and freedom. You must now know what to do. People will certainly gossip saying that you could have chosen somebody from the same social background as you. But the most important thing is that you know the choice is yours. You must always be in control of your life. Nobody should silence your voice. We will always stand by you. I know you have both got plans to move to Edinburgh. Your mother and I will come to see you, if time allows, but you must know that you can always count on us.”

Amy and Ben had a memorable wedding celebration offered by dad. Judge Dawson was the proudest of fathers when he walked down the aisle of the church, his arm under that of his only daughter to the alter. He wore a tailcoat, double cuff shirt, ivory tie that matched with his waistcoat. A white orchid buttonhole was fastened to his suit. The orchid matched that of Amy’s who held a bunch of orchids.

Contrary to Judge Dawson, Amy wore a non-classical wedding dress. A vintage and romantic lace dress at calf length with matching short veil. Ben wore a charcoal grey three-piece suit and an ivory shirt matching the ivory dress of Amy.

The wedding entrance song “The Prayer” by a young girl and a young boy did justice to Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli.

Chairs replaced benches. The chairs were dressed in white with a large ribbon tied in with big bow at the back. In each bow a white orchid looked proudly at the guests as they walked and took their seats.

After the church ceremony all the guests joined in a grand celebration under a marquis at the residence of Judge Dawson and his wife.

The tables were decorated with vases of white orchids and a fat candle in each vase.

A lounge area with couches and pillows was set up so that guests could have a rest between dances.

Ushers in uniforms were hired to escort guests to their tables.

Once all the guests were seated, Amy’s dad took his role as a judge. He acted as if he was presiding a court room and instead of the gavel, he used his knife and hit a champagne glass. All guests stopped talking and laughing. Their eyes turned to Judge Dawson. With his grave voice he said: “This is a day for celebration not only for me and my family but for all of you who have witnessed the souls and hearts of Ben and Amy joined together. Life as a couple is certainly not like a bed of roses. If not taken care of, watered, pruned and sprayed

from time to time with the best flowering solutions, the bed of roses will look like an abandoned cemetery. Amy and Ben will have to face many challenges and difficulties. This new journey will be at times rich, at times difficult, and at times may look unsurmountable but this is a road that they will have to travel together and overcome all difficulties.” He then invited the guests to raise their glass while the couple cut the wedding cake.

After the five courses sitting down dinner with plenty of booze, the guests danced to a live orchestra until the early hours of the morning.

The first dance between Amy and Ben was the highlight of the reception. Fresh flower petals were dropped on them from the ceiling of the marquis. Instead of the traditional waltz, they danced to a high-energy swing. Guests got a shock when they saw Judge Dowson and his wife joined the dance floor and danced to a hip-hop break.

When the guests left in the early hours of the morning, they were each offered a small bag containing a crystal bowl with the names of Amy and Ben engraved on it as a souvenir of the wedding.

The Dawsons kept their words and visited their daughter in Edinburg from time to time. The first time they visited, Ben was shocked when he saw Amy sitting on the lap of her dad. “You do not have to worry my son. Amy will always be my little baby. I will protect her until I die. Nobody will be allowed to hurt her.”

# THE BLEEDING HEART

Still sitting on the floor, Amy could hear her father's speech at her wedding five years earlier. "This new journey will be at times rich, at times difficult, at times look unsurmountable but this is a road that you will have to travel together." She also remembered what her father said to Ben, the first time he visited them in Edinburgh, "I will protect my daughter until I die. Nobody will be allowed to hurt her". These words turned in Amy's head like a mantra. She could not understand how life could be a contradiction. Her emotional life turned out to be upside down. "Oh Daddy! How can I travel this road together with such a violent husband," she thought.

She was in a dilemma and could not take the decision of turning to her parents. She knew that they would have helped her to get out of this traumatic experience. But it was out of question. Amy felt ashamed to telephone her dad to ask for support, advice and protection. How could she tell her dad that she was subject to violence in the hands of a man that her parents had adopted as their son? His father would go wild and in his deep voice would have told her daughter: "Is this how I have raised you up? I cannot believe that such an intelligent girl like you, a renowned young professional being subject to violence. Who could have done that to you except your own husband? Do not tell me that you fell down on the stairs or were attacked by some rogues in the streets? In my career as a judge I have heard this too often. Women prefer to

suffer in silence. They do not want people outside to know what is happening between the four walls of their houses. They are too ashamed to let people know that they are victims of domestic violence. This is even worse for women in high society. They prefer to suffer in silence rather than go to the police to file a case or go for a divorce. Surely, Amy, with your legal background, you should have known what to do. We are here to help but you must help yourself first.”

Amy was afraid that her parents would take the first train from Glasgow to come to the rescue of their only daughter. Not only her dad was a judge but both her mother and her brother came from legal backgrounds and the first thing they would have done was to go to the police and file a case against Ben. Amy did not want the matter to go public. People would start talking about this famous couple that they thought was a model to other couples. The sale of the media would rise to its peak. This news would become the talk of the town. The media would use her traumatic experience as sensational news. They would add their bits and pieces without verification to make the article looked like a sexy macabre story. Some might even say that Amy died in hospital soon after her assault by her beloved husband.

Amy thought of her group of friends with whom she went out for drinks from time to time. On second thought she decided it was not a good idea. She did not want them to know what was happening between the four walls of her house. She did not want them to know that her heart was bleeding. She had

never talked about the violence she was subject to in the hands of her husband. There had never been any trace of violence on her face, arms or legs. She knew her friends would help her and give her all the support. But she also knew that this would be the topic of their conversations for a long time to come. They would add their own bits and pieces to make a juicy, spicy and sexy story out of her unfortunate married life. “This is a great subject for gossiping; especially knowing that one of these friends is a bit envious of my professional career. She has also passed comments on my branded shoes and clothes,” Amy thought.

The only person she could think of was her gynecologist. She became quite close to her Doctor during the four years that Dr Munga was advising her and treating her for infertility. But she had never told her Doctor that she was going through domestic violence. The emotional and psychological violence that she went through was not visible. Nevertheless Dr. Munga did notice Amy’s sad face from time to time and told her “Amy, do not be so sad, do not worry. With all the latest treatment that we are trying there is every chance that you will become pregnant. But if the worse comes to the worse we can go for artificial insemination.”

When her Doctor tried to make her overcome her sadness, she just bent down her head and changed conversation by doing small talks. But on one or two occasions her Doctor pursued the conversation and she remembered how her Doctor advised her to go on a holiday outside Edinburgh. “Do

not get stressed, go out with your friends, book a holiday in an exotic place where you two can have a second honeymoon. Enjoy life with your husband Amy. With less stress there is more chance that you will get pregnant. I have advised this to a few of my patients and it does work sometimes. I still remember one of my patients who went on a cruise with her husband. She was like you following all treatments possible. Halfway on the cruise she felt terribly ill and was vomiting all the time. She could not enjoy the beautiful places where the ship stopped nor the events and facilities on the ship. As for the delicious food at the buffet, it made her feel nauseated. All she could take was sparkling water with some dry biscuits. On her return she took an appointment with me and bingo she was pregnant. Try it Amy. This might help.”

Amy knew that never in her wildest dream, her Doctor would have thought that she was a silent victim of domestic violence and was suggesting panoplies of entertainment and holidays. In view of her position in society, Amy always felt ashamed to tell her Doctor how her heart was bleeding and why she never responded to the advice of her Doctor on having a great time with her husband.

Before her husband started to mistreat her, Amy always thought that GBV did not concern her. According to her violence did not happen to people in high society but only to those on the margins of society. In fact, she was among the hundreds of women in all social classes, rich or poor, subject to domestic violence.

Instead of trying to get help she preferred to suffer in silence until that fatal day. She was never interested in the great work that was being done by Non-Government Organisations to reconstruct the lives of thousands of women and girls. She heard about the work of these organisations and she knew that women and girls who went through violence were robbed of their lives. She read about the work of NGOs. She listened to interviews of activists as well as survivors on Radio Channel 2 of the BBC but she thought this did not concern her and was never interested in giving a helping hand be it in terms of money, time or legal advice.

## **VISIT TO THE DOCTOR**

From her office and with the door slightly open, Doctor Munga heard Doreen arguing with somebody on the telephone.

Knowing that this was not in the habit of her Secretary, she went to the reception to know what was happening. In a soft voice and making sure that patients in the waiting room could not hear them, she asked, "What is the problem Doreen? Who is trying to be so difficult with you on the telephone?"

Doreen put her hand on the mouth piece of the telephone and said, "I am so sorry Doctor but I am doing my best to explain to Ms Dawson that you do not receive patients without an appointment but she is insisting. She wants to come right now or at least to speak to you on the telephone."

"Pass her on to me in my office."



Dr Munga went to her office. She talked to Amy and agreed to see her during her lunch time.

Amy arrived at the surgery 15 minutes before 13H00. On the dot of 1.00 p.m., Doreen accompanied her to the Doctor's room.

“Eh Amy, why this outfit? You are all dressed for the Scottish winter. You should have seized this rare opportunity of taking out your summer wardrobe and wearing your beautiful summer flowery dress. It is not every day that we have such a beautiful weather in Edinburgh. This is a rare chance to be trendy.”

Amy was dressed in a pair of long black pants, a thick blouse with long sleeves, and a pair of sunglasses covering half of her face.

Amy suddenly felt dizzy.

Doctor Munga threw a large smile while getting Amy to sit on the leather sofa. She pulled a chair to sit opposite her. “I am so happy for you Amy. At long last. It is normal to feel dizzy in your situation.”

Amy started to sob. “Eh! do not cry. You should be happy. There is cause for celebration and not crying after all these years of waiting to be pregnant!”

During the four years or so that Indra had been treating Amy and giving her advice on infertility, this was the first time she saw her cry.

Amy took out her sun glasses but could not even dry her tears as she was in so much pain. The tears falling on her cheeks amplified the physical and emotional pain. Dr. Munga got the shock of her life. During the four years she has been treating Amy never once had she guessed that her patient was subject to domestic violence. She quickly cut a piece of medical gauze and dabbed Amy's face.

"Oh my God you are in a bad state. Let me see if Doreen has not gone out for lunch yet. I will get her to assist me. I will also ask her to bring you something to drink."

Indra called Doreen through the intercom but there was no reply. "She must have gone for lunch. Let me see what I have in the fridge. I need some ice to put on this black eye. But I will not touch the bruises as I might do more harm than good. A cup of tea will certainly help a bit. Indra quickly put the kettle on and made Amy some tea. She handed the mug to Amy. Amy took the mug with her trembling two hands. She had a small sip. Her hands were so shaky that the mug fell on the ground. "Do not worry Amy. The carpet needed a good cleaning!", Dr. Munga said casually trying to relax the heavy atmosphere.

Doctor Munga had a proper look at her patient's face. She did not only have a black eye but there was a deep bruise on her left eyebrow that needed stitching.

"No wonder you are suffering so much. I need to examine you properly. With this bad bruise to your eye and part of your face, I only hope that nothing is broken. But you need urgent

medical attention. If the worse comes to the worse, it will be beyond my competence. I will then have to refer you to a neurosurgeon.”

The Doctor helped Amy to move to the couch and helped her to lie down. She touched Amy’s high cheekbones with precautions and said, “I cannot see any broken bones on your face. You are a bit groggy but the fact that you are coherent and could swallow a little bit of tea lead me to believe that you do not have a head injury either.”

“But you have to tell me the truth, Amy. Please do not tell me that you have fallen down from the stairs and hurt your face against a table. I have seen too many pregnant women who have been through domestic violence coming to me. I can recognize one easily. This looks like a clear case of domestic violence.”

Amy was so upset that she could not talk. She just nodded her head. “Are you hurt in other places as well? Is the winter clothing a masquerade to cover other parts of your body? Let me help you to take out your shirt and your pants so that I can examine other parts of your body.”

“I do not have to tell you, Amy, that by law I must report this to the police. You have a legal background and you must know what I am talking about.”

She nodded again. Indra helped her to remove her shirt and her pants.

Dr. Munga got a shock when she saw the bruises and blood clots on her arms and legs. “Oh! My God! This is very bad. He

must have hit you with lots of strength or with something. I will give you the first medical treatment. First of all, let me apply some cold compress to your eye and some ice packs on the bruises on your arms and legs. Knowing you cannot swallow properly I have dissolved a few analgesic drugs for you to drink. This will ease off the pain. I will prescribe more after I am done with you. Lie down a bit. Once you feel better, I will do a proper examination to know how bad the bruises are. I strongly advise that you are examined by a General Consultant as well.”

“I am here to listen to you. Please feel free to talk. Part of the healing can be done by talking. This can ease out the emotional pain. You can tell me what has happened. Why so much violence from somebody who is supposed to care, love and protect you. From what you told me, you looked like a great couple and were admired by lots of people.”

Amy told her Doctor how she became a punching ball in the hands of her husband. She was even whipped with a belt and blood oozed out from the cut of the large brass buckle.

“All this because I decided I could no longer remain quiet. I’ve had enough, Doctor. Enough of this hypocrisy. Enough of this false appearance of virtue and goodness. Enough of this artificial life. Enough of looking like perfect couple in the eyes of others. Enough is enough. I decided to talk. For once I had the courage of my conviction and told him that he could no longer silence my voice.”

In a soft and tired voice, Amy related how when she told her husband that she was not the only one to be blamed if they were not having children after five years of marriage. He went mad. His face turned red and Amy became an easy prey in the hands of this well-built man.

His predator was ready to attack and tear her to pieces. But Amy looked at him straight in the eyes and said. "I have done all the treatments possible although you have never accompanied me. I have even encouraged you that we have sex on the days leading up to my ovulation. We have had sexual intercourse on my fertile days. My doctor has helped me and advised me on how to predict when ovulation will take place so that we put all the chances on our side to have a baby. I have done everything that could possibly be done. I have even suggested that we have artificial insemination with your own sperm but you have refused saying that you prefer that I get pregnant the normal way. Maybe the problem is with you and you should do a sperm test. I am prepared to take an appointment and we could go and see a doctor together. There might be something wrong with you. A semen analysis will help the doctor to determine if you are infertile. The analysis will certainly help to determine if a low sperm count or sperm dysfunction is the reason behind this infertility. Depending on the results we can decide if we want to adopt a child. There are so many innocent children both in Mauritius and abroad who have lost their parents in dramatic and horrific conditions. We could give a child or even two

children a home, the chance of a lifetime to have a proper family. The chances to experience a good life, go to school, acquire an education, live up to their full potentials and even become professionals. “

Amy started to cry again and said her husband’s reply was a punch in the face and kicking all over her body. She lost her balance and rolled down the stairs. “This is when I hit my head with a table and fell on the ground. He ran down the stairs but instead of helping me to get up, he said, ‘You bitch you want to degrade me now. How dare you? I am a well-built man with all my virility and in control of my life. I enjoy sex. I have never had to take Viagra as I have never had any sexual problem. Each time I have a sexual intercourse I reach my climax and enjoy the orgasm. Nobody has ever challenged me. I have been going out with lots of women before knowing you and even now I have casual sex with different women. Although there is no commitment or emotional attachment, these women enjoy having sex with me. Not only they enjoy having sex with me, they ask for more and more in one single night and each time I have an orgasm. Who do you think you are to challenge my virility?’”

“I do not have to tell you the rest of the story,” Amy added. “I took a taxi and here I am. I could not telephone my parents. They are too sharp. They would have known that I was subject to violence in the hands of a man for whom they have high esteem. As you know, my brother is a criminal lawyer and my father is a judge. With their legal minds they would certainly

have done everything to put him behind bars. My brother has not lost a single case. He would have been too happy to defend me.”

“Your parents would have been right, Amy. A person like that should not get away with murder. He could have killed you. He should be behind bars. Once you feel better, I will give you a short report that you can take to the police. It is important that the police open a docket. I will also give you a prescription. If you feel like seeing a General Practitioner, I can recommend you to one of my colleagues. May I suggest that you find a place to stay until the police completes its investigation? If the investigation takes too long, you might have to contact your parents and live with them for a certain period of time. You will not only be safe with your parents but will get all the emotional, psychological and legal support. Your husband will not dare to go to their place. Has he been violent before?”

Amy replied with a lump in her throat. “He does insult and degrade me. Once or twice he has slapped me but he has never been that violent. Each time he has been violent he has asked for forgiveness and very often offered me dozens of red roses, my favorite flower. He cooked dinner and made sure that there was a bottle of white wine at table. I even blamed myself and forgave him.”

Amy paused for a few minutes then said, “I will never forget the day I returned home from work earlier than planned. I went up to our bedroom to change my shoes and clothes. I

got the shock of my life. He was having sex with a young woman who looked like a fragile small girl. He was enjoying himself so much that he did not see me. The girl saw me. The sadness, the pain and the grief in the girl's face made me think that she had been forced to have sex with him. Ben was nude from the waist. With no pants on, I could see how he was moving his buttocks in a violent way. I grabbed him by the collar of his shirt. The girl was completely nude and her legs wide open under him. Few drops of blood were trickling down her thin legs. Her face showed all the sufferings she was enduring. Ben looked at me and turned wild like a savage animal and told me that he was enjoying sex with a virgin. The girl looked at me with tears pouring down her cheeks. She was silently imploring me for help but I could not look at her. I left the room. I went down to the living room to pour myself a whisky. I saw that there were two glasses and a half bottle of green label whisky on the table. He must have forced the girl to drink. The face of the girl haunted me so much that I took my car and went out for a long drive. When I came back, Ben was waiting for me with a bunch of red roses. He had prepared a beautiful meal and the table was set with our best plates and cutlery and our crystal wine glasses. A bottle of champagne was in the cooler reader to be opened. I threw the flowers in the bin, said I was not hungry and went to bed. The big mistake I did was not calling my brother. I could have reported him to one of these NGOs working with GBV cases but I did not. This was a clear case of date rape with one of his



young office staff. Maybe he told the girl that this was the only way to get a promotion at work. Since that day I have had regular nightmares. Always seeing the face of that young girl looking at me with grief and tears in her eyes imploring me to help her. She has been haunting me since that day. I could and should have done something or even go to the police. I was selfish and a coward thinking about myself and what people would say. I did not want people to know what my husband was doing inside our own house and worse, on our bed. How stupid? How selfish? How cowardly?

I thought of my status in society. What status? It is only now that I realise that when it comes to gender-based violence, we are all human beings going through the same violence in the hands of those who are supposed to love us and protect us. I really regret it now. Maybe this is my punishment for not helping this young girl. I could have saved so many other girls from rape. I am sure he has forced other young girls to have sex with him promising increments and promotion or warn them that they would lose their jobs.”

The Doctor did not want to put salt on the wound and remained quiet. She helped Amy to get dressed and asked her to have some tea with her. She helped her to hold the mug as her hands were still trembling. She refused the biscuits given to her. She was having difficulty to munch and to swallow. They both remained quiet for a few minutes. Amy bent her head and looked on the floor. She concentrated so much that

one could get the impression that she was in a deep silent conversation with the floor.

After 10 minutes or so, Amy told her Doctor, “You are right. Since the taxi is still waiting for me, I will go straight to the police to file a complaint. I will then go home, pack a small luggage and book a place in a small hotel for a couple of days. Nobody apart from you will know where I will stay. After the swelling and the blood clots have disappeared, I will telephone my mother and tell her that I have taken a few days off work and will stay with them for a short holiday. She will be on top of the world as I cannot remember the last time I stayed with them. They have kept my apartment and are always asking when I will have some quality time with them. Once I am all settled in my parents’ house, I will talk to my brother and my father to know the way forward. My decision is taken. I have suffered too much and this has been going on for too long. I am now at the end of my straw. Once the trauma is over, I will have a family reunion and all the secrets and lies will be told. I will tell them about all the violence I have endured during all these years. It is about time that I unlock this filing cabinet inside me. Each drawer of this cabinet has a secret story to tell. It is about time that truth be told. I am sure my brother will help me to sue Ben not only for domestic violence but for raping young girls as well.”

Amy knew she would not have any problems in filing a case and finding a lawyer. Her parents would be too happy to help. “My brother will most probably investigate in all the sexual

relationship he has had with women to know if these women were forced to have sex with him and ready to testify against him. Both my dad and my mum will leave no stone unturned. They will also make sure that he turns to the street as the house we are living in is a wedding gift from my parents.”

“Good decision Amy. Now I can see the self-confident and strong woman in you,” Dr Munga said before adding “appearance can indeed be deceptive and it is for us to unveil the mask, break the silence and try to get help.”

With these words, Dr Munga walked Amy to the door and asked her Secretary, who was back from lunch, to accompany Ms Dawson to her taxi.

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## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Dr Indra Munga always insisted that her patients be accompanied by their husbands or partners for their medical examination. She liked to explain what was happening to the foetus and the mother. She wanted the father to be involved right from the beginning. She believed in the importance of men and their role in the process of pregnancy and childbirth. “Fathers must be fully involved in maternity care. They cannot breastfeed but they can give the bottle. Fathers who are engaged in pregnancy and birth are more likely to remain engaged in the lives of their children,” she kept on saying to her patients.

When her patients came to her surgery without their partners, she questioned them. She had a different approach from most of her colleagues. She felt she could do some walking with her patients and learn their difficult paths. While examining her patients she encouraged them to talk. She firmly believed that women could not conceive if they were under stress. By talking to them she could easily identify those who were going through any kind of violence. Sometimes there were no bruises as there were no physical assaults. But the psychological and emotional violence was sometimes worse. It was the heart that was bruised. “Healing by talking” became her mantra. She had a good knowledge of intimate partner violence. She knew that violence could be part of the daily life of some of her patients and the situation could get worse during pregnancy. But in the case of Amy Dawson she did not detect anything as her patient was always jovial and they sometimes did small talks and laughed a lot.

In her career, Dr Munga had seen so many women from different socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity going through violence. She even followed a course on how to deal with survivors of gender-based violence to be able to help her patients in a professional manner. The physical violence that came to her was easy to detect as the marks were visible. But with her background and the course she had followed, Dr Munga could very often detect the invisible violence like sexual, emotional, economic and verbal violence just by talking to her patients. As far as possible she encouraged them

to talk and gave them necessary advice. But some of them refused to talk. In most cases she preferred to refer them to a psychologist or suggested marital therapy. She did advise some of her patients to go to the police to file complaints so that they could get protection orders.

But she had never seen a case like Amy's. She knew her patient was having emotional problems with herself because she could not conceive after several years of marriage; but she was shocked when she saw all the violence she went through. Dr Munga blamed herself for not having detected that her patient was a silent victim of domestic violence.

She knew that the language of some men was slapping, kicking and insulting. In her career she had witnessed low birth weight of babies and sometimes maternal and infant mortality due to violence. She knew how intimate partner violence led to life-threatening to both mother and the foetus. She encountered quite a few problems in delivering babies of mothers who have been through violence. While talking to her patients, some related how they were kicked on the abdomen.

She had delivered babies who later turned out to be mentally handicapped. She had delivered dead babies as the foetus was in distress through violence.

She saw too many cases of gender-based violence in her career. Husbands beating their wives during pregnancy. Men forcing their girl friend to have unsafe abortion. Men refusing to father their child and saying that their partners were loose.

Women who had contracted the HIV virus because men wanted to have skin to skin sexual intercourse.

Doctor Munga did her best to help all her patients, even those who came to see her with their personal problems. But had a special attention for those who were pregnant and going through violence at the same time.

Quite a few times Dr Munga had been advised by her colleagues not to get too involved in the private lives of her patients. But it was above her. She could not do otherwise. She too was a survivor of violence although not a physical one. She went through harsh discrimination by a woman who was supposed to love and protect her, her own mother. Her mother did not stop blaming her for being a girl instead of the long-awaited boy. She was the curse of her mother. “What have I done to get this kind of punishment from God? To give birth to a girl!” her mother used to say day in and day out. But fortunately, in her case her father played the role of both mother and father. He was the one who woke up at night when Indra was a baby. He was the one who would bring her a cup of hot chocolate when she was studying until quite late at night.

Indra got so involved with the problems of some of her patients that very often she felt completely drained, as in the case of Amy.

Indra could never have guessed that a great professional like Amy could have been subject to domestic violence.

## NEWS FROM HOME

While still reflecting on Amy and all the cases of gender-based violence that had come to her and her own discrimination through the hands of her mother, she heard a loud knock at the door. She did not have time to reply. Her Secretary just barged in. “Doctor, I am sorry to disturb you but you are not replying to the telephone. You must take this call. It sounds quite urgent. It is a long-distance call.” Indra suddenly came out from her reflection and was surprised to see her Secretary barging in her office. “What? What are you talking about Doreen?”

“A call from Mauritius which sounded urgent, Doctor. Shall I pass you on the call?”

“Are you sure Doreen. I have never received any call from my home country. “

“Yes, Doctor. It is a man’s voice asking for you urgently.”

“Pass me the call Doreen.”

Indra was flabbergasted as she had never talked to anybody from Mauritius since she settled in Edinburgh.

She picked up the telephone and immediately recognised the voice of her father at the other end of the line. Her mind quickly worked overtime. “There must be a racial riot and my father does not want me to return to Mauritius. Or maybe something terrible has happened to my brother, Kris. He was so unstable.” She told herself.

This was the first call she had received since she left the country eighteen years ago. She did send a card to her parents from time to time but her father was the only one who replied. When she sent her parents a big framed picture of her graduation through DHL it was only her dad who responded by sending a bouquet and a bottle of champagne through 'Inter-flora' with a card attached to say "from dad with love". Not a single mention of her mother congratulating her.

In a soft voice, her father said: "Hi, my princess. Hope you are well. I know you are quite surprised hearing me on the other side on the line as I have never called before. I apologise for that. My work has kept me busy day and night. Your mother does not know that I am phoning you. But I feel it is my duty to talk to you as I do not want you to learn from other people that your mother is sick."

"Oh my God! Please tell me how sick she is"

In her mind Indra thought that her mother was on her dying bed since her dad had never called.

Rishi Munga continued the conversation: "You may have a few Mauritian friends and news travel fast and I do not want you to hear that your mother is sick from them. I know too well how Mauritians love to gossip and will add their bits here and there. They might even say that your mother died and you did not even go to the funeral. I only want to assure you that everything is under control and your mother is getting proper care. You do not have to worry at all."



The call ended before Indra had the time to respond and to ask for a few questions.

Indra sat down with the telephone in her hand. She took a piece of paper and started to scribble without even knowing what she was doing.

Her mind was not at rest. She was torn apart not knowing what decision to take. She told herself, "What to do? Return to Mauritius to look after a mother who has not raised a little finger to help me. To care for a mother who has nothing but contempt for me. The psychological and emotional discrimination that I suffered in the hands of my mother is difficult to comprehend. Do I leave all the love, care and affection I have found in my adopted country to go and look after somebody who has always treated me like dirt? "The voice of her father haunted her, "your mother is sick". Her mother must be on the verge of dying; otherwise her father would not have telephoned.

A mother, most probably on her death bed; a daughter who went through emotional and psychological violence by her own mother and now a reputed medical doctor in Scotland. Indra found herself in a dilemma.

"Leave all my happiness and the love of my life behind.

Leave a country that has given me everything including University studies to become not only a Doctor but a well reputed Specialist.

Leave my patients who trust me and need me not only to deliver their babies but to talk to them; to heal them by talking; to advise them.

Leave colleagues, friends and a fantastic environment.

Leave all this to go and look after a sick mother who has never cared for me?"

She suddenly felt a great weakness. Her legs turned jelly. She was after all under the oath of Hippocrates. Her professional conscience told her that she should go back to Mauritius to at least know what was happening to her mother before it was too late.

Indra put down the receiver and walked straight towards the door of her colleague. Contrary to her manners she knocked loud at the door and before her colleague had the chance to reply, she opened the door and said "you must look after the surgery for some time. My mother is very sick. I am taking the first flight to Mauritius to see how bad the situation is before taking a decision on my return."

Her colleague was appalled and looked at Indra straight in the eyes not understanding what was happening.

Indra could not bear this look. She bent down her head. She felt a lump in her throat and had to make a big effort to swallow her saliva. Her stomach turned topsy-turvy. She felt dizzy and her eyes welled. She did a quick swerve and returned to her office. She sat down for a few minutes to cool down and let the dizziness go.

She, then, took her car keys, closed the door of her office and told her Secretary that she would be absent for some time and to refer all her patients to her colleague during her absence. She knew she was breaking lots of promises with this decision. Promises to her patients, to her colleagues and to her friends. Indra was somebody who had always kept her promises. She always told her friends “do not make promises if you cannot keep them” And yet she was the one breaking promises. When Indra left Mauritius, she promised herself that she would never set foot in the country again. She was now doing exactly the contrary.

Fortunately for Indra, the traffic was not dense at this time of the day. She drove at a reasonable speed and reached her flat in the nick of time. She did an online booking for a one-way air ticket to Mauritius. She also did an online booking for train ticket to Glasgow. She was fortunate to get a flight for the next day as it was off peak season. She packed a small cabin luggage and very early the next morning her colleague dropped her at Waverley Station so that she could take the train to Glasgow Airport for a direct flight to Mauritius.

At the station, her colleague rushed to a booth and got Indra a large cappuccino. “Take this on the train with you. I know you did not have time for breakfast. You can order some breakfast on the train. Please, promise me that you will eat something.” Indra thanked her colleague with tears in her eyes and said, “Thank you so much. You are so caring and thinking of everything. I am sorry, I am so sorry, I sincerely apologise. I do

not want to leave you behind. I really do not want to break my promise. We have had such a great life together. Lots of people do not know this kind of happiness and now I have to leave everything behind and do not know when I will come back.” Her colleague did not respond and Indra walked fast without looking back.

During the two-hour train journey to Glasgow International Airport Indra tried to drink her coffee but the lump in her throat made it impossible to swallow and she also felt nauseated.

She tried to read a bit but could not concentrate.

On reaching Glasgow Airport she threw away her carton cup in the bin and rushed to the main terminal. She arrived on time. Everything was done quite fast as she had only a cabin luggage and had already registered and booked her seat on line.

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## **ON THE WAY TO MAURITIUS**

Indra was lucky that the plane was not full and she had three seats all for herself as the other two were empty. She tried to get some sleep but her mind was too busy thinking of what was awaiting her in Mauritius and what she had left behind in Edinburgh. When breakfast was served she took only a cup of black coffee and tried to doze off but could not.

Lunch was a beautiful tray of typical Mauritian food which looked delicious but Indra could not eat. Instead she gulped a glass of red wine and asked for another one. She thought that the wine on an empty stomach would make her sleep. Being a Doctor, she should have known better. The wine had a contrary effect. She felt agitated to the point of distraught. The relationship she had with her mother before leaving Mauritius haunted her. She started to think if she had any close friends in Mauritius but could not think of any. The only two persons she was close with were her father and her aunt Nishta. Apart from these two persons she had no emotional bond with anybody, not even her brother, Kris.

Since leaving Mauritius apart from the cards she received from her father from time to time, she had never had a conversation with him. Not even on social media. She had never shared her private life with her father.

Her mother was never present for her even in her most difficult period. Reminiscing on her childhood, Indra told herself "I have no friends in Mauritius. I have cousins of my age. I am not close to them as I only met them at family events. When I went to college, I was not allowed to invite my friends at home. I did not get permission from my mother to go to their homes either. I am not sure now if I have taken the right decision?"

While Indra was thinking on her past, a light snack was being served. She struggled to eat the biscuits and had a cup of coffee.

She then decided to work a bit. She took out her laptop and did some work on a report that she had to send to the Medical Council after an international workshop that she had attended on obstetrics.

The report helped to take her mind off the traumatising experiences she had with her mother.

Indra was concentrating so hard that she did not hear the main purser announcing that all electronic equipment should be switched off and seat belts attached as they would soon make their landing at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport. A hostess came to her and politely told her to switch off her laptop, stack it under her seat and to put on her seat belt.

Indra quickly closed her laptop, put it in its case and placed in the rack above her head. Before putting on her seat belt, she opened her handbag, took out her hair brush and quickly brushed her hair. She put on some pale pink lipstick. She then put on her seat belt and waited for the airplane to descend. The plane landed on time.

Getting out from the plane she was amazed to see a completely new airport. When she left 18 years ago the airport was very small with very little infrastructure, no duty-free shop on arrival and only one counter to pass through customs. She went through immigration quite fast as there were several counters. She saw an airport of international standard that could be compared to any airport in the world. She had no time to either admire this state-of-the-art airport

nor go the duty-free shops that looked tempting. She was in a hurry to meet her dad. She did not have to wait for any luggage from the conveyer belt as she had only a small cabin luggage. She rushed outside and was suffocated by the heat. She could not believe her eyes when she saw the size of the parking.

Her father was waiting for her near the outside gate. When she saw the face of her father, she knew that the situation was quite bad. She even thought that her dad had left the dead body of her mother in the morgue to come to the airport. They hugged each other. Her father held her tight with his strong arms. "Eh, you are suffocating me with your big arms, dad" Indra said with a big laugh.

Rishi Munga took Indra's luggage and said, "This is all you have as luggage. You do travel light, young lady. The car is not too far. Let us walk."

As soon as they were settled in the car, her dad quickly reassured her that her mother was in a private hospital called Apollo Bramwell. "This is the best place I could have taken her to. They have all the latest technology and most sophisticated equipment and their specialists have worldwide reputation. It is the best in the region. People from all over the world come to Apollo to get treatment."

There were very few private clinics when Indra left Mauritius. Furthermore, hospitals were not well equipped and the hygiene was not up to standard. Only poor people went to hospitals. Mauritians and especially children with complicated

illnesses had to be flown overseas either to India or South Africa for treatment or to be operated when specialists came to Mauritius.

Indra's father explained, "18 years ago when you left Mauritius, we only had basic health care but now nearly all hospitals in Mauritius have specialised wards. Patients' health and safety have been greatly improved. Mauritians do get quality care closer to their homes. Apart from the main hospitals there are health centres in all localities. The specialised units are well equipped with latest technology and sophisticated medical equipment for a wide range of illnesses and diseases including cardiovascular, diabetes, cancer and HIV and AIDS. Very often private clinics have to refer their patients to the hospital as they are not as well equipped as hospitals. There are even special public health clinics for HIV positive people. They get their drugs as well as psychological and medical treatment for free. They are encouraged to go for group therapy with NGOs." Being a medical doctor, Indra listened with great interest and then said, "In that case why did you not send mother to a public hospital?"

"You will be surprised how your mother has not changed, Indra. She refused to go to a public hospital and this against the advice of her physician. She argued and said that a person of her status should not mix with low class and poor people. I do not have to tell you how she had always and still look down on poor people, "Rishi Munga replied.



Looking at roads through the car window, Indra could not believe her eyes and asked her father: “Where have all the sugar cane fields and all the beautiful trees gone? I can see concrete everywhere. Our diverse flora and fauna were protecting the environment. How come in a country like Mauritius which is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and its adverse impacts, trees have been cut down to make room for concrete?” She could not understand and added “all over the world now, the mantra is planting a tree and save the planet and in Mauritius they are felling trees. I believe the mantra in Mauritius is plant a building and kill the environment. I really cannot believe it.”

As there was no response from her dad, Indra changed the conversation and said, “I must admit that the roads are very good though, compared to when I left. They were narrow, bumpy with lots of potholes. They are now smooth with different lanes.” But Indra could not stop herself from saying: “I am heartbroken to see all the harm done to the environment. “

Rishi Munga did not respond as he had his part of responsibility in destroying the environment. He worked for a big corporation which believed only in big profits even if this meant walking on dead bodies. Instead he said, “Let me take you home so that you can refresh yourself, drink and eat something, then we can head to the hospital.”

“If you do not mind, dad, I would like to go straight to the hospital. I believe it will not take us long as the roads are so good.”

Indra was worn out after this 14hour flight and yet she could not wait to see the condition in which her mother was.

“I am here for mum. Seeing her will put my mind to rest.”

It did not take them long to reach the hospital.

## **SHASTI IN HOSPITAL**

On reaching the gate of the hospital, Indra asked her dad to stop her at the main entrance of the hospital so that she could get out. Her father left her at the main entrance and said. “I will park the car and will wait for you in the cafeteria on the ground floor. You can take your time with your mother. I have my laptop with me and will seize the opportunity to do some work.”

Indra rushed to reception and asked for Room 606. An usher directed her to the lift and told her to go on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. She took the lift and as soon as she reached the 6<sup>th</sup> floor she quickly looked for Room 606. She opened the door softly and walked like a cat towards her mum’s bed. She did not know how her mother would react to her presence. She was not sure if her dad had told her mother about her sudden visit. Shasti Munga was under drip. A woman in her late 60s with long black hair but the root of the hair was white. What a

contrast! It was as if a bird of peace, the white dove, was fighting to get back its place from the nasty black crow. Shasti had always had an issue with her age. She wanted to remain young. She skipped the question when people enquired about her age. She spent loads of money at the hairdresser to dye her hair and at the spa for body and facial massages. In her head all the massages would stretch her skin and would make her look younger. She went to the aesthetician at least once a fortnight. In her mind she could be compared with Bollywood stars. But this was only on the outside as she did not have any beauty in her heart and soul. Appearance was more important to her. This outer beauty took control of her life and she had to always cling to expensive products. She tried all the latest cosmetics and went for cleansing, exfoliating to slough off dead skin, waxing, laser treatment and all sorts of treatment. She even did chemical peels in order to reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.

She was so happy and loved all those who told her “you look younger than your daughter.”

But on her sick bed without any makeup, she looked like somebody else. Her face was gaunt with dark circles under her eyes. The wrinkles and facial hair took control of her face. It looked as if the natural was fighting to get its place back from the unnatural and winning in the process. She not only looked older but she looked like somebody else on this hospital bed. She did not have any strength to fight back. She just could not

care and did not even ask her husband to bring her aesthetician in the clinic. Her illness was gnawing her like a piece of cheese being gnawed by a rat. The pain was so hard to bear that she had to be put on morphine from time to time. She nevertheless wore the most beautiful blue flowery satin silk nightdress and a dressing gown of the same colour sat on a chair besides her. A pair of blue branded slippers could be seen on the floor.

The perfume of a huge bouquet of seasonal flowers from the best florist of Mauritius was trying very hard to fight against the odour of sickness, the smell of drugs and the medical smell of the clinic but in vain.

Her linens were brought from home. Very personalised with "Shasti" embroidered on them and decorated with the best broderie anglaise. In all her weakness she told her husband that she refused to sleep in the same sheets and used the same towels that patients have used before her. In fact, if she could, she would have brought her own mattress from home. She did not care if she was insulting the hospital. And yet, she was in the best hospital in the Indian Ocean. People travelled from all over the world to get treatment at Apollo Bramwell Hospital. The hospital was well known for its immaculate cleanliness where linens and towels were disinfected, washed and ironed and changed twice a day.

For Shasti, the fact that her husband was the Chief Executive Officer of one of the largest corporations in Mauritius meant

that she was superior to other people. She kept the same attitude even on her sick bed.

Shasti had never worked in her life. Although depending on her husband financially, she had a glamorous lifestyle and looked down upon poor people. She owned a car and yet was chauffeur driven in the huge black Company luxury saloon. The driver accompanied her at supermarkets and markets to carry her shopping. Madam would degrade herself if she carried baskets or loaded and unloaded her goods from the boot of the car to the kitchen.

She was in an en-suite room with a big attached bathroom and toilet; a small dinner corner and a fully furnished lounge with two leather sofas and a coffee table. The view from her window was breath-taking overlooking the Ebene region with mountains in the background.

Shasti coughed softly, looked at the direction of Indra then turned her head to the other side without saying a word. She made as if she had not seen her daughter.

Indra pulled a chair close to her mother's bed. She took her hand and caressed it gently. Although very weak, Shasti pulled out her hand.

Shashti did not have any emotional or physical attachment with her daughter. She always said that she would never like to have a daughter. When Indra was born she was so upset that she went through a depression and had to be followed by a psychiatrist. For Shasti, Indra, had taken the place of her so long-awaited boy. When Shasti was pregnant with Indra, all

her planning was for a boy. Shasti wanted a boy who could be the pride of the family having failed with Kris, the first son. During her pregnancy she dreamt of a son who would shine as a professional and become a national and international figure.

## **LONG AWAITED BOY**

Shasti prepared the coming of the baby boy with lots of care and attention. She bought a wide variety of blue baby clothes, booties and shawls. The room was painted in blue and decorated with images of Winnie the Pooh here and there. There was a huge blue ribbon attached to the cradle as if the baby would be like a parcel to be admired. All small details mattered for her bundle of joy, her *beta*<sup>1</sup>.

When she delivered a beautiful baby girl with curly hair and her four fingers full of blood in her mouth, instead of showing her happiness, Shasti could not stop crying. Her husband talked to her “We have a son already. It is good that we now have a daughter. The most important thing is that all went well and the baby is in good health.” For Shasti, the baby was a usurper and had taken the place of the so long-awaited *beta*. “Where have I sinned to be punished like that? Why is God not having mercy on me? A girl is a curse from God;” she told her husband. She even refused to breastfeed the baby

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<sup>1</sup> son

although she had enough milk to feed the whole maternity ward. The baby had to be fed on bottles.

The Mungas started to have problems with Kris since the boy was quite young. Kris used to play truant and very often instead of going to school he went out with his friends to play under a large tamarind tree in the outskirts of Curepipe, near a little lake.

During his secondary schooling he went out with friends to the infamous regions where drugs were sold. He started smoking cigarettes, and then went on drugs and alcohol.

Kris did not do well at school. He signed his school reports by imitating the signature of his father.

Shasti knew that her son was taking drugs and was taking alcohol. And yet, not only she did not put him to task; she gave him money when he asked for it. For her it was not her son's fault but peer pressure. When Rishi Munga questioned Kris' behaviour the reply was "the boy cannot do otherwise. He will be out of his group of friends and they will look down upon him if he does not behave like them. Young people can do all sorts of mischiefs to keep their friends. We must be happy that he is not dependent on drugs and goes to school." The boy wore only branded shoes and clothes. After wearing them a few times, they were put in the bin. Not even given to charity or the gardener.

The day Kris came back with his School Certificate results, Shasti nearly fainted. She thought her son would fail but got the shock of her life when Kris announced that he had passed

his examinations. Shasti started phoning around to say that her son was a genius. To her son, she said “do not worry my son if you just made it and got a grade III. Most important of all is that you have passed your examinations. It does not matter if you will not be promoted to do your Higher School Certificate Classes. There are so many degree holders out there who are unemployed or doing low paid jobs. I know a young boy who has a very good degree in economics and he is now selling vegetables in the market. Can you imagine? Spending all this money on University education to finish up in the market and being insulted by buyers? Your dad has lots of contacts and one of his friends will certainly find a good job for you. Meanwhile enjoy yourself. Here is some money. Go out with your friends to celebrate your success.”

It was not easy for Rishi Munga to find a job for his good-for-nothing son who had only a third-rate certificate in his pocket. He moved mountains and finally got one of his friends to accept to take Kris on trial for three months. Kris stayed in the job for less than one month. He was finding it too tiring having to walk from one floor to the other to carry documents. One day he just decided not to go to work. He told his mother that his legs and arms were aching. “I thought we no longer had slaves in Mauritius but by the way this Company treats me, I feel like a slave. I even have to make tea for the Heads of Departments.”

One evening when Rishi Munga came back home after a long and tiring day having had to work late, he saw his wife



massaging the legs and arms of Kris with “Nuxe Huile Prodigieuse”. He was speechless and after a few minutes said, “I thought you bought this very expensive product for your personal use and now you are using it to massage Kris? I will never know what goes in your mind Shasti. Can you explain why this good-for-nothing boy needs a massage?”

“What can I do? The boy is suffering a lot. His whole body is aching from the low-grade job you found for him. They are treating him like a slave there. Is this the sort of job that you could find for your only son? He has every reason not to go back to work. Find him another job;” was the reply of Shasti. It was already very late. Rishi Munga was out of his mind. His face showed how angry he was but he kept his calm and did not say anything. He did not want any tension in the already heavy atmosphere of his house. He went straight to his room, locked the door and took a long bath. He went to bed with a few reports but could not concentrate on his work. He took the daily newspaper L’Express out of his bag and started to look for advertisements on vacancies. He realised that there was no point in asking the boy to apply for a post or getting him to go for an interview. It was a waste of time as his application would be turned down as soon as they saw his qualifications. “My son is not even good for cleaning shoes. But on the other hand, if he does not work, he will roam around all day with his friends and will soon go on hard drugs and be a drug dealer himself. Maybe I will be able to decide

what to do after a good night sleep”, Rishi Munga told himself before taking a sleeping tablet.

His wife did not even call him for dinner. In fact, she knew there was no point in calling him as he rarely ate with his family. He either had dinner in his office or went out with his friends for a couple of beer and a good dinner in a pub or a restaurant. Even on Sundays he did not have lunch with his family. He went to his friend’s place who welcomed him with open arms. He had lunch there and stayed the whole day, playing cards or enjoying himself playing football with the three small kids in the garden. This was a luxury that Rishi Munga could not get in his own family.

Since Indra was born, they took the decision of having separate en-suite rooms. The baby was put in her cradle in a separate room with a maid. Rishi Munga very often got up when the baby cried. He enjoyed feeding the baby and changing her nappies at night although the maid was employed 24 over 24 to look after the baby. “Sir, please do not do that. This is not a job for a man and if Madam knows that you are attending to the baby, I will lose my job. I need this job very badly to feed my family. Please Sir, go back to sleep, I can look after the baby on my own;” the maid would say. But Rishi Munga insisted of looking after his adorable baby. Sometimes Rishi Munga took the baby to his bed, held her in his arms or over his chest until the baby fell asleep, then returned her to the maid.

The decision of having separate rooms was taken as Rishi Munga who could no longer bear the extravagance of his wife's lifestyle. Branded shoes, clothes, perfumes, beauty products for body and hair were competing with each other and were all over the place. On top of that there was also a cinema style television fixed to the wall with a large variety of DVDs on a shelf. The walking wardrobe remained open and it was difficult to walk in the room with shoes and clothes everywhere.

When Rishi Munga suggested separate rooms, his wife was only too happy. "This is a very good idea. This will give me more space and I will have more freedom to rest whenever I want to and watch films when I cannot find any sleep," she answered.

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## **KRIS AT WORK**

Rishi Munga thought he would be able sleep with the sleeping tablet. He was wrong. He tossed and turned in his bed. He tried to do some meditation to relax a bit but in vain. He had to find a solution for his son. He decided to telephone one of his best friends and ask for advice. It was after 11.00 p.m. but he knew his friend would reply when he saw the number of his mobile screen. Furthermore, he sat on the Board of his friend's company. His friend immediately replied. Not only he

recognised the number but was an insomniac suffering from the same marital problem as Rishi Munga.

The friend agreed to take Kris to do clerical work but on a probationary period. “He will work in the office of the Human Resource Manager and his work will be monitored and a report given to me on a weekly basis. I will then report back to you so that you know how your son is doing. Are you OK with that, Rishi?”

“How can I thank you? I am so relieved knowing that it is nearly impossible for Kris to get even the lowest job in a private company let alone in a public company,” was the reply of Rishi Munga.

Early in the morning, while having a cup of coffee on his own, Rishi Munga called his wife and Kris and told them that he had been able to get Kris a job in a private company. Both Kris and his mum were on top of the world as they thought this would be the best job that Kris could get. Not only Kris would be trained, he would also work in a Company where his father sat on the Board which meant he would be superior to his colleagues at work.

Alas! Kris thought he could do whatever he wanted as his father was a Board Member. Instead of working he started giving orders to make other people work for him. Once, without realising he gave orders to the General Manager. He was sacked on the spot.

His father was at the end of his tether. His wife kept on bullying him, “What kind of father are you, if you cannot help

your own son. Would you like to see your son roaming in the streets all day?"

Not knowing what to do and to buy peace, Rishi replied "I will try just one last time and whether you like it or not this will be his last chance. You will then have to decide what to do with him. Maybe he could accompany you on your shopping spree or when you go to your friends' place to play cards. I am now completely worn out with this good for nothing."

In this last job Kris showed the capacity of creating chaos all over the place. When the General Manager was not in the office, Kris sat at his desk, put his feet on the table and smoked cigars. Once or twice he had helped himself to a whisky from the mini bar. The GM did not notice as Kris washed his glass and did not leave any trace behind.

After only two weeks in the job, at lunch time he met with the workers in the canteen. He enquired about their schedule of duties and their salaries. He looked at them straight in the eyes and said "you are being exploited. You are not being paid according to the work you do." One of them said "No! Sir, you are getting it all wrong. The Company goes according to the law and we are paid overtime when we work outside normal working hours." To which Kris replied: "This is not at all possible when you look at the profits the Company is making. You should strike. I will not only help you but I will lead the strike. Let us start the strike tomorrow."

The news did not take long to reach the ears of the General Manager.

Kris was called by the General Manager and sacked on the spot. "Take your personal belongings and go. I do not want to see you in this Company again. The Finance Section will send a cheque through your father for the two weeks you have worked. A form will be attached to the cheque and both you and your father will have to sign the form and return it to me by registered post. Meanwhile I am telephoning your father to tell him what has happened. Please get out of my sight immediately. But before you go I will call the Head of Security so that he can search your bag, do a body search and accompany you to the door. "

Kris bent down his head and mumbled "I am not a thief. This is disgrace at its best. How can you treat me so low?"

The GM did not reply and called security.

Once Kris had left, the GM called an urgent meeting with all his employees from top to bottom. He went through the Labour and Industrial Laws as well as the Company rules and regulations and HR policies. He advised them to give their resignation if they were not satisfied with their salaries.

"There are many people out there who do not know how to feed their families. They are begging for jobs. If I show you the number of letters I receive each day with very qualified people looking for jobs you will be surprised!"

With one voice the workers at the bottom of the scale replied "Mr. Kris encouraged us to go on strike, Sir, but we would never have followed his advice. Some of us have worked for donkey's years here. We are happy with the salaries knowing

that we are better paid than in other companies. The atmosphere at work is good. We get cheap and well-balanced food in the canteen. We sometimes buy food from the canteen to take with us home in the evening. We have uniforms and shoes for free and on top of that we have medical benefits for us and our families. The children of some of us have been able to do University Studies as it is the policy of the Company to give scholarships to the bright children of the employees. We are very grateful for that, Sir. We may not be at management levels but we have graduates in our families. We are also thankful that we get loans for our children's tertiary education. Sir, we would never have followed Mr. Kris's advice. Please believe us."

Rishi Munga was chairing an important Disciplinary Committee on a case of sexual harassment by one of his Managers when his Secretary knocked at the door and went to speak in his ear.

He turned red, apologised and said he had something urgent to deal with. He told the Committee that his Deputy Chair would take over. But before he left he told the Committee, "As you are aware I have asked for a confrontation between the Manager and the lady in question in front of our Legal Adviser. My understanding is that the lady has been harassed on several occasions. She did not get her promotion because she refused to sleep with the Manager. At times she has been asked by the Manager to stay in the office quite late, not for work but so that the Manager could cajole her into a sexual

relationship. She has been going under severe stress and even went through a depression. The Manager has told her that he would inform her husband that she was a loose woman if she refused to have sex with him. The lady did not give in and instead reported the case to me. I have asked her to put everything on paper. The Legal Adviser found the Manager guilty during the confrontation and advised him to send his letter of resignation. He has refused saying that it was the lady who was harassing him. I leave it to you to deliberate. My Deputy will give me a full report on your deliberations before we ask the HR Manager to draft a letter with extract of deliberations. The letter will be vetted by the Legal Adviser and signed by me.” Rishi Munga apologised again and left the Conference Room.

He went to his office and asked his Secretary to pass him the call.

He knew something bad had happened when his Secretary disturbed the meeting to speak in his ear. But what he heard was unimaginable. He could not believe his ears when his friend related the whole account of Kris behaviour at work and how he urged the workers to go on an illegal strike. He apologised profusely and told his friend that he was going straight home to deal with the matter.

He called his driver and went straight home.

As soon as he entered the living room, he got the shock of his life.



He was horrified to see mother and child sitting on the sofa enjoying a glass of beer and eating snacks.

He was so furious that he slapped Kris hard on the face. Kris' glass fell over the newly done flowery upholstery. This was the first time that he laid hand on his son.

Both mother and child were appalled. Kris had a red mark on his right cheek and his eyes welled.

“Shame on you! Slapping your own flesh and blood! Have you lost your mind? What kind of father are you? Don't you have any regrets for treating your son like dirt? Why did you slap him?” Shasti shouted at her husband.

“He did not tell you what had happened at work.”

“Yes, he did. And you should congratulate him. Can't you see that it is not the boy's fault? Be proud of him. He was fighting for the rights of the workers. You want him to behave like a girl and be silent when workers are being exploited. He wanted them and their families to have a better life. Do not forget that he has a School Certificate in hand. He is not as stupid as you think he is and he knows when he sees people being treated like slaves. I am happy that my son is so caring and wants to help people at the bottom of the scale.”

“I prefer to leave the room before I do the irreparable” was the reply of the father.

Shasti always turned a blind eye on all the sufferings and harm his son was causing to people around him including his own father. Without realising it, Shasti was helping Kris to go deeper into the mud. Kris knew how to play with the

sentiments of his mother. When he needed something, he gave his mum a bottle of “*Johnny Walker Black Label*” from his dad’s stock and said that he bought it with his pocket money for cheap on the black market. He knew too well that his dad would not notice as he bought them by the dozens. Rishi Munga had his own supplier and got his whisky cheaper than the market price.

When Kris was at home, he asked his mother to have a drink with him. Mother and son drank, smoked and had a good time together. When Kris saw that his mother was a bit tipsy, he took the opportunity to ask for money. Not satisfied with the amount his mum gave him, he found the solution in the pocket of his father. His dad knew that Kris was stealing money but preferred to turn a blind eye rather than confronting mother and son.

Kris was the best client in a nightclub in Curepipe. He spent large amounts of money on drinks for himself and for his friends there. Once or twice the Manager had had to call the police when the jolly group got out of control and started to turn tables upside down and dancing with girls who did not accompany them. His father stopped counting the number of times he had to pay for bails to get Kris out of prison.

With his big collection of branded shoes and outfits he imitated singers and actors. He looked odd with his blond hair and brown skin. He thought he was the reincarnation of James Dean and he even had a red leather jacket like the one James Dean wore in “*Rebel without a cause.*”

Kris had an answer for everything. When his father questioned him on ill-famed places he went to regularly his reply was: “Poor women, they need money to feed their family. Work is work. They are selling what they have and I buy the product. They give me a good service that I enjoy. You should try these products. There is such a large variety in different shapes and colours. They do any positions they are asked to do. All very sexy. They beat all positions in the Kamasutra. You can accompany me if you wish.”

Kris had the right to dye his hair but when one day Indra asked for permission to cut her hair to shoulder length, Shasti went mad. She slapped and insulted her. “Are you not ashamed? Can girls have short hair? Get out of my sight. I do not want to look at your ugly face. Go to your room and start thinking of who feeds you in this house. You *nimakaram*\*<sup>2</sup>!

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<sup>2</sup> Nimakaram - ungrateful

# IMAGINARY SHORT DOCUMENTARY

Sitting down on the chair, Indra looked at her mother on her hospital bed and started to think of her childhood and the relationship her mother had with her.

She went down on memory lane and had the impression that she was taking part in a short documentary in black and white on the relationship of a child with her mother. The little girl was the main actress. The story of this little girl was so well done that it could have taken place in any African or Asian countries where girls were second class citizens and a curse for their parents. It showed the sufferings and discrimination that girls faced.

The documentary was so real and down to earth that it could have won an Oscar at the Cannes Festival.

The little girl thought her mother was the most beautiful woman on earth. In her innocence and love for her mother, she did not realise that it was all the makeup that transformed her mother and made her look so beautiful. She saw the night cream, day cream, foundation cream, false eye lashes, eye liners and all sorts of makeup competing with each other on her mother's dressing table. She did not realise that these were the secrets of her mother to look like an Indian actress. On the pots of cream, she could read Yves St. Laurent, Chanel, Dior and other branded products.

When her mother's door was ajar, she peeped slowly into the room to get a glance of what her mother was doing on her laptop. She was proud to see her mother on the internet. In her childish mind she told herself: "My mother must be very bright to go on the internet and know exactly how to order beauty products, branded shoes and the most stylish clothes from British, French and Indian Companies." She admired her mother for that.

Very often she listened at the door when her mother was talking on the telephone. She heard her mother talking to the driver for her appointment at the aesthetician or the hairdresser. She longed for her mother to ask her to accompany her but she did not dare to ask. She imagined that she was sitting on a bench sucking an ice lolly and admiring how her mother was being transformed at the beauty parlour or at the hair salon.

The child sometimes could not resist the temptation of sneaking through the narrow opening of her mother's door. She made herself even smaller and sat on the floor to watch her mother trying all the colourful and stylish outfits including dresses, pants, silk shirts, salwar kameez and saris. The little girl was happy and excited when she saw her mother turning around in front of the mirror and her hair blowing in the air. When the mother noticed the presence of the little girl on the floor, she said, "am I not the most beautiful woman?"

Without realising that this outside beautiful was all ephemeral, the little girl replied “you are the most beautiful woman in the world.”

The child was a bit like Cinderella. She wore ugly and outdated clothes and shoes. She was not aware that her mother was trying to do miracles by performing different procedures to her skin to maintain its overall appearance and to combat ageing. She did not even know that it was all the waxing, threading and use of depilatories that made her mother looked young.

When the little girl started to grow and coming back from school, she kept on peeping through the half-open door of her mother’s room. She then started to see the selfishness and wickedness in her mother’s character. Snow White being her favourite fairy tale she even imagined that her mother talked to the mirror like the Evil Queen “Mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who in this house is the most beautiful of all?” Fortunately for her mother the mirror did not reply as by then the little girl had been transformed into a beautiful young lady with long black silky hair and a perfect feature and figure. A young lady who did not need any make up. The mirror would certainly have replied “The little girl is now a lady and she is the most beautiful of all”.

Looking back now Indra said to herself “it was not an aesthetician that she needed but a psychologist or a psychiatrist as she was so jealous of her own daughter who

had beautiful features, silky hair and a face that did not need any make up.”

Another episode of this short documentary featured a girl of about twelve or thirteen years old preparing to go to a wedding with the family. She needed help from her mother to get dressed and to arrange her long hair. She was told off. Her mother was angry and told her. “Behave yourself and stop being childish? You can put on your dress and comb your hair all by yourself. I have plenty of things to do. I have just finished doing my makeup. It is for you to help me to make sure my sari falls well. Sit on the floor and make sure that the pleats of my sari are well done and my petticoat is not showing. After that I need you to help me with fixing the hook of my pearl necklace.”

The girls obeyed with tears in her eyes. Here was a mother who prevented her to go stylish. She was forced to braid her hair into two long plaits with pink ribbons attached at the end. She was compelled to wear flat shoes that looked like school shoes. Her dress pleated at the waist made her look foolish. She was not allowed any make up or wearing a little bit of pale lipstick.

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## AUNTIE NISHTA

Indra remembered the first time she had her period. She thought that a big curse had fallen on her and that she would bleed to death. She looked at all the blood coming out of her vagina and dripping on the floor. She cleaned the floor. She did not know what to do and told herself “My mother is right. There is a curse on me. I am doomed. I have cancer and I am dying.” She stole cotton wool from her mother’s drawer to wipe the blood from her vagina and her legs. When the cotton was not enough she folded sheets of toilet paper and put them between her legs and on her vagina. She had terrible stomach ache, suffered atrociously. She was terrified, her face turned white. And yet she did not tell her mother anything as she was so afraid of her. After two days, Indra could not bear it anymore; she did not go to school. Although she had always depended on herself and sometimes the maid, she was, nevertheless, close to her father. But thinking she had a cancer she did not want to worry her dad and preferred to suffer in silence.

Rishi Munga did notice that there was something wrong with her daughter. On the day that Indra did not go to school, Rishi Munga came back home early from work and saw Indra with a hot water bottle on her stomach. “Indra, please tell me what is wrong with you. You are so pale and you look frightened. You have never missed school. This is something that you have



never done, so there must be a good reason. You have to talk to me so that I can help. Do you want me to call a Doctor?"

He then turned to the maid to know what was happening. But the maid remained silent. He then said "Indra if you do not want to talk to me. Please let me call your aunt. She loves you so much that she will come immediately."

Indra agreed. It took 45 minutes for Nishta to knock at the door after her telephone conversation with Rishi. She parked her red sports car in front of the main gate of the Munga's house.

An impressive lady dressed in a pair of black pants and white linen shirt appeared in the house after knocking at the living room door. Nishta, the elder sister of Shasti by three years, was completely different from her sister. A self-assured lady with an imposing personality. She had very short curly hair, copper coloured skin, tall and wearing Moschino flat shoes. She was so different from her sister.

She rushed towards Indra who was still with her hot water bottle on her stomach and curling on the couch. She said in a caring voice: "You, silly girl, your dad told me what is happening to you. Why did you not call me? You know you can count on me. Now stop crying. I have brought you everything including some pain killers." She whispered something in the ears of her brother in law then said "I want to talk to my niece in private, can you please leave us alone." Rishi turned red and the way he looked at Nishta showed that there was some kind of chemistry between them.

Nishta talked silently to Indra and they both went to Indra's room upstairs. Nishta asked her to sit on the sofa and explained what was happening to her. "Your father is not stupid you know and he told me that he thought you had your period. You are a big girl now. It is very unfortunate that your mother did not explain anything to you. But I am to blame as well as I should have had this talk with you long time ago. You have started your period. This is a natural part of growing up for any girl. I went through that as well. All girls go through this process. The blood is from your womb and has nothing to do with cancer. Your body is now changing. Your period will happen every month at the same period and you will bleed for a few days but very often not more than seven days. You must have noticed that your hips and breasts have got a little bit bigger. Have you noticed any hair growing under your arms and around your vulva? Do not be afraid. This is normal." Nishta assured Indra that there was nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed of. She took Indra to the bathroom, made her pull down her panties and took off the toilet paper between her legs. She asked her to go for a hot shower while she waited outside the bathroom and asked her to call her once she had finished. When Indra was done, Nishta went to the bathroom and showed her how to use the pads that she bought on the way to Rishi's place. She then gave Indra some pain killers, made her a cup of hot chocolate and asked her to rest.

Shasti was in her room. She heard the conversation between her sister and Indra but stayed quiet. As a mother she knew that Indra had her period. Furthermore, her cotton wool was disappearing. The maid did tell her that Indra's underwear and dresses were full of blood and she believed that Indra had her period. But Shasti did not lift a little finger to help her daughter.

The maid was not allowed to talk to Indra and even worse giving her advice. "Domestic workers are here to do the house chores, cooking and looking after the dogs and are not supposed to mix with members of the family" Indra's mother used to say. The maid was treated like an animal. She was served with the rest of the food in a tin plate and drank from a tin mug. She sat on the steps outside the kitchen to eat or drink her tea.

She lived in a small shack at the back of the house with an outside toilet cum bathroom with no lights. At night she had to carry a candle when she had to go to the toilet. Even when she was working inside the house she was not allowed to use the guest toilet but had to go outside to her own toilet. A big bread fruit tree and a murunga tree hid the ugliness of the one bedroom corrugated tinned shack of the maid.

Nishta made sure that Indra was comfortable before giving her a big hug. She took out a small box wrapped with a red ribbon from her handbag and gave it to Indra. "This is a small souvenir to remind you of the first time you had your period. I quickly popped to the jeweller on my way here."

Although still in pain Indra opened the box and saw a magnificent pair of gold earrings. She kissed her aunt with tears in her eyes and thanked her profusely. They hugged each other tightly.

Nishta did not even ask about her sister. She went down the stairs; saw Rishi waiting at the bottom of the stairs. She told him that everything was fine and he only had to make sure that Indra was comfortable and to give her whatever she felt like eating. Nishta gave Rishi a piece of paper and told him to go to the pharmacy to buy a few packets of sanitary pads and some pain killers. She gave Rishi a kiss on the cheek. They both went red like two lovers madly in love.

“I am really grateful that you have come. I really would not have known what to do as Indra did not want to give me any details.” Rishi said while accompanying Nishta to her car. “I love my niece Rishi. She could have been my own daughter.” Rishi did not reply and looked down on the pavement. Nishta then added “Do not hesitate to call me if you need my help. I will always be present for my niece and for you, Rishi.” With these words Nishta went to her car and drove away with a heavy heart.

## **LAWYER NISHTA SAHU**

Rishi made a flashback on the day he saw Nishta for the first time.

It was in the Industrial Court where Lawyer Sahu defended a case in which he was the main witness. He lost his mind when he saw this beautiful lady in her lawyer's robe twisting him while he was in the box trying to defend his Company. His Company sacked a worker for indiscipline. The Secretary of the Trade Union took the matter to court.

Lawyer Sahu went into great details and cited extracts of the Industrial law as well as the Company Law. Not only the worker got his case, the judge ordered the Company to pay him a large compensation for unfair dismissal. Mr. Munga was so dazzled by this stunning and brilliant lawyer that he lost all his means and had to look for words. At times he could not even reply to the questions of the lawyer and the Judge.

He lost his case. Fell in love with the lawyer. Love at first sight. Before leaving the court, he congratulated Lawyer Sahu and very politely asked her if he could invite her for lunch. To his surprise the lawyer accepted but said that she only ate salads for lunch as she could not concentrate on a full stomach. "I know a place near the court where they have the most beautiful salad bar. Shall we go there?" was Rishi's response. Nishta smiled and said "I cannot go to the restaurant in my court robe. Give me a few minutes to leave my files and my court robe and I will join you in the restaurant. Just give me the name of the restaurant."

"OK! But we will have to walk there as it is a pedestrian zone. I'd better wait for you outside your office."

The restaurant was at the end of a small alley. They walked on this old alley which looked like a Mediterranean stone street. The restaurant was an open one with tables and chairs under huge trees.

They both ordered salads and a bottle of sparkling water. They talked a lot about their work for over one hour. They exchanged business cards, shook hands and went their own way.

Rishi did some research to know who this fantastic woman was. He learnt that she had never lost a case. She was considered to be the best lawyer in criminal as well as in industrial cases. She was a great human rights activist and had defended many men and women for free especially women who were subject to violence.

Rishi could not stop thinking of the lawyer. Two days after this salad lunch, he toyed with the idea of calling Nishta to invite her for dinner. He took his courage and telephoned her.

Nishta, too was longing for this telephone call and she immediately agreed. Rishi went to fetch Nishta from her flat. He rang the doorbell and a ravishing woman opened the door. Rishi blushed and could not help telling Nishta how beautiful she looked. Her short hair looked even shorter. Her copper skin colour matched beautifully with her bright red dress which fell at her calf. She wore high heels black shoes. She had no jewellery on. She had very light make-up. Even her lipstick was very discreet.

Rishi had already booked a table in an up-market restaurant and told Nishta “I am taking you to a place where nobody will disturb us.” In fact, Rishi was afraid that his parents would know that he was going out with a girl. Worse! A mature professional woman, four years older than him and dark in colour.

While enjoying their red wine, Nishta told Rishi how she dared to challenge her parents when she told them that she wanted to go overseas for her studies. Both her father and her mother were mad at her and told her “Indian girls do not go for University studies. We know you are a bright girl, this is why we let you do your Higher School Certificate. You have to give the good example to your younger sister. Once you finish your HSC you will either find a job in an office or stay at home to learn how to look after a home. It will be difficult for us to find you a good husband as your skin is so dark but being given that we are rich, we are sure we can find somebody for you.” With these words from her dad, Nishta worked even harder and won a scholarship to do law in England. Her parents were devastated when she told them that she was leaving the country for University Studies. They were ashamed that a girl from a good Indian family had decided to go and live on her own in a foreign country. They did their best to make her change her mind. They even asked grandparents, aunts and uncles to talk to Nishta. There were big family meetings where the elders tried to get her to change her mind. Nishta’s decision was taken. At the end her father told her “if you leave

this house you had better not set foot here again. We will not consider you as our daughter.”

Nishta was called to the bar in England where she worked for a couple of years before deciding to return to Mauritius.

While in England she went through a legal firm and bought a flat in Mauritius. On her return she went to live into her two-bedroom flat which had two en-suite rooms. She turned the flat into the most magnificent and comfortable place to live. The living room was nicely decorated with beautiful paintings and antique furniture. On the Persian rug sat a large coffee table with a few handmade pots filled with natural orchids.

On that night at the restaurant, they knew they were madly in love and could not be separated. A week after when Rishi invited Nishta again for dinner, Nishta said “No, I am not going out with you to a restaurant.” Rishi was in shock and replied “What has happened? What have I done to you?”

Nishta mockingly replied “You, stupid man! You have not done anything to me but I want you to come to my place and we can spend the evening together. If you can come on Friday this will be great as I am not working on Saturday and we can have a late night.”

“Friday suits me fine as I am also free on Saturday.” Rishi bought two bottles of the best Merlot and reached Nishta’s flat on time. Nishta asked him to help her in the kitchen and taught him how to set the table on a beautiful white embroidered table cloth with the best plates, cutlery, wine glasses and scented candles. Rishi opened a bottle of wine and



brought it to the kitchen and they both drank while dinner was being cooked. They looked like a couple who has known each other for a long time.

After dinner they sat in the living room, had more wine. Rishi turned a bit tipsy. "I wonder if I can drive in this state. I do not want to lose my licence." Nishta looked at him in the corner of her eyes and on this they both went to the bedroom.

They did not sleep. They had such a great time caressing each other and making love.

The next day they had breakfast in bed before Rishi left for home.

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## **SCHOLARSHIP**

While her mother was out to play cards with her friends or in the house drinking and smoking with Kris, Indra spent her time studying and doing her homework. From time to time during Shasti's absence, Rishi Munga took Indra out to lunch in the best restaurant of the island.

Rishi felt sorry for Indra seeing her burning the midnight candle and told her not to worry if she did not win a scholarship. "I will pay for your fees in the best British University, Indra. Please do not get so stressed, my princess. Your health is more important than anything else." Rishi, very often, sat with his daughter at night and brought her a cup of hot chocolate with some biscuits. Indra was grateful and sorry

at the same time for her dad. She knew her dad was miserable with her mum.

Indra preferred to count on herself for her University studies and worked for a scholarship. Her auntie Nishta was her role model and she wanted to be like her. She told herself “any scholarship would do. Even if I have to go to India. As long as I leave this house.”

Her dad paid private tuitions for her with the best teachers of Mauritius. After work Rishi Munga went to fetch his daughter from her private tuitions with a little box of snacks that Indra enjoyed in the car.

The day of the results of the Higher School Certificate, Indra was very nervous and bit all her nails. She stayed in her room listening to the radio. She could not believe her ears when she heard that she came out first on the science side. She jumped on the floor with tears in her eyes and called her dad on his mobile. She also tried to get her auntie Nishta on her mobile but the mobile was on silent mode. Her auntie was defending a complicated case of gender-based violence. Indra left a message on her mobile to inform her of the good news and that she was on her way to College.

Rishi Munga was attending a meeting outside his office. When he saw Indra’s number he immediately replied and could not hold his joy. He told all the committee members that his daughter was not only a laureate but came out first on the science side. He apologised and said he had to go home to celebrate his daughter’s achievement.

Rishi arrived home with a bouquet of the most beautiful red roses. But Indra was nowhere to be found. His wife was sitting in the living room. "Have you seen Indra?" he said. "Did she tell you that she came out first on the science side?"

"No! she did not tell me but I could hear all the shouting and the stumping of floor in her room. I believe she has gone to school to meet her friends. She went out without telling me."

"You have never brought flowers home. I suppose they are not for me."

"No! They are not. They are for Indra. I will go to her College and give her the flowers there."

Rishi Munga had difficulty to reach the podium with all the firecrackers and shouting of the girls. He finally got hold of Indra, kissed her and gave her the flowers. In the crowd Rishi noticed a lady still in her lawyer's outfit but without the robe. Both Rishi and Indra made their way in the crowd to finally pulled Nishta to them. The three of them hugged and kissed. Father and daughter returned home hand in hand to an empty house which suited them. Rishi wanted to discuss with her daughter regarding the course she wanted to do as well as the University she wanted to go to.

When the euphoria of the results went down a bit, Indra told her dad that she had already applied to three British Universities to do medicine but her first choice was Edinburgh University. "I am now going to send them my results and wait which one I will get but I am keeping my fingers crossed for Edinburgh University"

Indra's dream came true when after a few days she got a seat to do medicine at the University of Edinburgh.

## **ROMANTIC DINNER**

During the same week that Indra got her seat to do medicine, Shashti Munga told her husband that she was spending a week-end with her friends in a hotel.

Father and daughter were too happy to have the house all for themselves. Kris was never at home and if he were to come late, he had his own keys. "This is a perfect occasion to celebrate your success Indra." Rishi Munga said.

On Saturday morning, after a late breakfast, Rishi Munga asked his daughter to get dressed. "I want to take you out on a shopping spree before we have a light lunch together."

They went to an up-market designer shop and Rishi Munga asked to see the Manager. "I want you to help me and my daughter and get the most beautiful stylist evening dress as well as a few other dresses." Once the choices were made by Indra with the help of daddy and the Manager, Indra went to a booth to try her dresses and walked in front of daddy. When both daughter and father were happy with the collection, Rishi Munga did not even complain about the high price and paid with his gold card.

Rishi Munga told Indra "Now you can't wear these beautiful dresses in school shoes. Let us go for shoes."

Off they went to a shoe shop. Indra became the proud owner of her first evening dress, few other magnificent dresses of different style and colours as well as a few pairs of beautiful shoes including her first pair of high heel shoes. When she tried the high heel shoes, she had problems walking in them and had to be helped by her father and the shop assistant. They all laughed as they found it so funny. Indra had always worn flat shoes or school shoes. With some help she soon felt comfortable in the shoes and walked around the shop without any problem.

The shopping spree was followed by a light lunch.

After the lunch, Rishi Munga took his daughter to the hairdresser and the aesthetician. This was the first time in her life that Indra went into a beauty parlour. Indra was transformed after her hair was cut to shoulder's length. The hairdresser did a miracle and brought out all the beauty of this soft and silky hair of Indra. "She has beautiful hair and I would so much like to work with this kind of hair more often. Why you did not bring your daughter to me earlier Mr. Munga? She has the richest of ornament, her hair." Rishi Munga did not reply. As soon as the hairdresser was done with Indra's hair, Rishi took his daughter upstairs to the beauty parlour and the nail bar.

Next station was Mado for perfume and make up. Rishi Munga bought his daughter the best perfume and a set of branded make up.

Back home the maid did not recognise Indra with her new hair style and her make up. It took Lizzy some seconds to realise that the lady in front of her was Indra.

Rishi Munga asked the maid to help Indra get dressed up as he was taking out his daughter for dinner.

The proud Rishi Munga's eyes welled up when he saw his daughter walking down the steps in her sexy evening dress and her high heel shoes. "My God, Indra, you beat Audrey Hepburn in "My Fair Lady". You are so beautiful. You will turn so many heads. All these young men will be at your feet." He gave Indra his arm and said "Let us go. I have asked the driver to come as I want to sit with you at the back of the car. Let us make the most of this evening."

Off they went to a five-star hotel in the East of Mauritius. All eyes were set on them when they entered the dining room. A beautiful young lady in a striking electric blue silk dress showing the curves of her body holding the hand of a well-built man in his mid-fifties. His pepper and salt hair made him look distinguished. His off-white raw silk shirt matched his pair of brown trousers.

Some people stopped eating. They were in awe looking at this couple who looked like stars. In their hearts they must have said "he is good looking with an imposing personality but a bit old for this young and beautiful girl. Maybe he is swimming in money and the girl does not mind. We do get lots of sugar daddies nowadays!"

The Head Waiter welcomed them. Rishi Munga shook hands with him and presented Indra.

The pair kept holding hands and was directed to a discreet corner at the far end of the main dining room where a beautiful small round table was set up with the most beautiful white table cloth, crisp napkins, set of glasses and cutlery, candles, flowers and a bottle of champagne.

They felt all the eyes of people in the restaurant on them which made Rishi smile. Rishi Munga was so proud that she held Indra tight by the waist and helped her to sit down before taking his chair opposite Indra.

The Head waiter opened the bottle of champagne. Indra tasted her first glass of champagne. She did not like it and said: "Dad, what have you given me to drink. This tastes like Epsom salt." Her dad laughed and encouraged her to sip very slowly and let her mouth get used to the champagne. With the encouragement of her dad, Indra soon got used to the taste and found herself drinking a second glass. Although Rishi Munga was an expert in red wine which was his favourite alcoholic drink he decided to stay on champagne for the sake of his daughter.

After this three-course gourmet cuisine which was all decided in advance on the recommendation of the Chef, Rishi Munga took a little box from his pocket and gave it his daughter.

"What are you waiting for? Go on! Open it!"

Rishi Munga had tears in his eyes seeing the amazement in his daughter's face. Indra was speechless for a few seconds

before leaving her place and put her arms around her dad's neck, kissed him profusely and said. "Oh! Dad, I cannot believe it. I have always seen diamonds in magazines and sometimes when mum wears them but this is the most beautiful one I have ever seen. It will make me think of you and this memorable evening all the time. I promise that once I am abroad it will remain around my neck all the time. "But you have to wear it first young lady."

Indra went back to her chair and it was Rishi Munga's turn to leave his seat and he went behind Indra to fix the white gold chain around Indra's neck. "You are the most beautiful girl I know, Indra, both outside and inside. You have a good heart and you will always succeed in life. Keep the chain as a souvenir of your dad who loves you dearly and did not have the courage to challenge his wife. But I know you will one day get married to a nice boy who will love you and take care of you."

The eyes of all the diners were fixed on them when Rishi Munga tied the chain around Indra's neck. Some people in the restaurant knew Rishi Munga by his reputation as a great business person while one or two were his partners. They knew he was married with a family and could not believe that he was going out with such a young girl and offering her a diamond pendant.

A live band was playing romantic music. Rishi Munga left his seat and offered his arm to Indra and invited her to dance



with him. "I do not know how to dance dad, not only I will make a fool of myself but people will laugh at us."

"I do not care if people laugh at us. I want to dance with my daughter. Do not worry! We will go very slowly and I will teach you the steps. You might step on my toe. It does not matter I have good shoes and you won't hurt me." Rishi said jokingly before adding: "You will soon get the gist of it and will get carried away by the music while I hold you tight. You will see you how much you will enjoy that. I can assure you that you will stop only when the music stops."

They had such a great time dancing that they did not realise that the music had changed from slow to the graceful waltz on the music of the famous composer Johann Strauss to the sensual tango passing through the incredibly rhythmic cha-cha-cha and the famous mambo. They danced it all. On the dance floor Rishi Munga showed his talents as a dancer and did not have any problem to get his partner to swing along with him. When the band started to play Bollywood music, Rishi Munga was at his best. He did all sorts of energetic movements and even invited some tourists who were in the room to dance along with him and his daughter.

They left the dance floor only when the band took a short break. Indra was curious to know how his dad had become such a good dancer. "Dad, I did not know this side of you. Where did you learn to dance like that? You look like a professional dancer and can dance to any music."

“Darling, I used to dance a lot before I married your mother. I even took dancing lessons from professionals. I was so good that I was invited to participate when international troops came to Mauritius. I just sneaked out at night and off I was in my car to the Port Louis theatre. I, sometimes, did not even return home. But one evening during mainstream news on the national television, there was an excerpt of one of the concerts I took part in. I had no idea that the television was filming the concert. My parents got a shock when they saw me on television. They went mad. They were not expecting that at all although their friends did tell them that they saw me dancing live. They argued with their friends and told them that it was all the makeup that made the dancer look like me.”

The day after the cat was out of the bag and the whole Mauritian population saw me on television, my father called me in his office and asked my mother to come along.

Imitating his father’s voice Rishi Munga said “Rishi you are our only child, let alone our only boy. You are intelligent. You have been to University abroad and have got a first-class honours degree in Economics. You have a fantastic position in a private company and this on your own merit. You are now behaving like a vulgar “*nachaniya, a nathak walla*”<sup>3</sup>. You are bringing shame on the family. Shame on you! We have not brought you up to become a *nathak walla*. This is for cheap people and certainly not for people of our standard. Indians do not

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<sup>3</sup> Men playing women’s part

perform in public like that. Leave this to the Creole boys and girls. Anyway, we have found a beautiful girl for you. She has a fair complexion and comes from a rich family. She is the younger of two daughters. I have invited the parents of the girl to come home for tea so that we can arrange the marriage. They have always longed to have a boy and you will be the son they have dreamed of. They have not succeeded with their elder daughter who has brought shame on the family. She is strong headed and lives on her own. Although she is a well reputed lawyer, there are rumours that she receives men in her flat. Shasti is the right girl for you. Well behaved and knows how to look after a house and a family. She did her secondary studies.” Mr. Munga Senior went on to say “Furthermore your mother has a poor heart. She wants to see your wedding and her grandchildren before she dies.” Taking back his own voice, Rishi said: “I was, of course, taken aback and did not know what to say. I became numb. My feet turned jelly. I was at a complete loss. I had never challenged my parents. They had been so kind to me and had given me everything. And the worse is that my mother had a heart problem and I did not want to be cause of her death. My fate was sealed. There was no question of going back to say that I did not want an arranged marriage. Or even worse tell them that I was in love with the elder sister. They would have said that she was a loose girl, black and older than me by so many years.”

“My mother died soon after the wedding ceremony and it did not take long for my father to follow her. They had a fantastic life together. Always caring for each other. And yet it was an arranged marriage. My father broke stereotypes and helped his wife in the kitchen. The three of us had breakfast together. My parents got up very early so that breakfast could be ready before I went to school. They did the same even when I started to work. My father always said breakfast was the fuel that charges you up for the rest of the day.

For him the body needed energy to go about the day. He said that I would not be able to study or to work if I did not have a proper breakfast. Together they made a whole variety of Indian breakfast. I still cannot understand how they made these delicious meals so early in the morning. There was one kind of breakfast for each day of the week. I can still taste their uttapam. They soaked rice at night and in the morning mixed it with urad daal, spices to make a creamy batter ready to be spread on a pan. This was then topped with onions, tomatoes and curry leaves. A meal in itself. They also made Rawa Upma with fresh vegetables, spices, lentils, aromatic nuts, curry leaves and coconut. Most beautiful morning meal. They sometimes forced me to take some at school or at work. Their Indian pancakes made from moong dal, paneer and vegetables and sometimes topped with homemade yoghurt were the best I have ever eaten. No Chef could compete with her.”

Rishi went on to say, “my parents were my role model. My mother did not do higher studies. My father had a doctorate in science from the best Indian University. You know, Indra, using them as my role model I thought I could make this arranged marriage with your mother work. My father used to help my mother dressing up when we went out to weddings. He sat on the floor to make sure that her sari was the right length. He helped her to put on her earrings and her necklace. After helping my mother then he would make sure that I was well dressed too. I still remember how he taught me how to knot my tie. He sometimes even cleaned my shoes.

For my mother’s sake who had a good life with my dad, I did everything so that my wedding could work although I did and still do not love your mother. I am still in love with your aunt although we stopped seeing each other until the day you had your period.

I walked the seven steps around the fire with your mother and promised all the different obligations including mental and physical strength, a healthy life, attainment of happiness in all circumstances, our welfare as well as the welfare of all those around us, peace in the home and in the world and so on. I stayed with your mother because of the promise I made to my parents.” He took Indra’s hand in his and said “also because I love you too much. I knew things would have been difficult for you if you had to stay with your mother and Kris without me. I wanted to protect you.”

He went on to say “I wanted to give your mother, Kris and yourself all the love and care in a stable family. Alas! Your mother is too selfish and self-centred. I do not have to tell you the rest of the story. Your mother is a selfish woman always thinking about herself and competing with other women and even her own daughter to know who is better dressed and who is the nicest looking.”

Rishi then added, “Indra, listen, we are here to have a good time and let us make the most of the present moment. Forget about your mother. Forget about Kris. Forget about all the challenges you had to face with your mother. Remember you can always count on me and your aunt. I know she loves you. That day when she came to help you when you had your period for the first time, she said “Indra could have been her daughter”. I knew what she meant. Yes, we were madly in love and I was the only man in her life.”

While talking to Indra, Rishi Munga felt that the people in the restaurant were getting even more curious and especially those who knew him.

A couple even came to their table and the wife said “Are you not going to introduce us to this beautiful young lady, Mr. Munga? You seem to be having a great time together.” Their curiosity led them to ask more questions and the husband added “Are you staying at the hotel tonight?”

Both Indra and her dad could not help giggling. They told themselves that they had to put a stop on the stares of the

onlookers. Indra told her dad that she was getting very embarrassed with the situation and would like to go home.

Rishi Munga pulled his chair, asked Indra to take her handbag and he held her tight. Instead of moving to the door to go out, he took Indra to the podium. "Dad, no, please, I do not want to make a show of myself. Let us go home."

No! we are not. I need to put the nose of all these curious people in their own ....."

"Some of them know that I am the Chief Executive Officer of one of the largest companies in Mauritius with branches all over Africa. These peeping toms want to get a scoop. I will give them their scoops, these paparazzi. I am sure some of them have already taken our pictures to send to the media. This will of course make a beautiful story: middle-aged Rishi Munga, CEO of one of the largest companies in Mauritius going out with a gorgeous young lady less than half his age. He will surely divorce his wife. He has offered the lady a diamond pendant."

Rishi Munga stood up; took the hand of her daughter tight and asked if he could speak in the microphone. While adjusting the microphone, somebody shouted: "spit it out Mr. Munga. Tell us who this irresistible lady is. You have been drinking champagne and dancing with her all night. We even saw you giving her this beautiful velvet case and tying a chain around her neck. Do not keep us in suspense. Tell us the good news."

"Yes, indeed, I have very good news for you all in this room tonight. Some of you know me and one or two of you are my

partners in business. Let me tell you, this is the happiest evening of my life. I know you have been wondering what this middle-aged man is doing hugging and dancing with this most attractive young lady. Yes, I love this young lady to bits. This is the most beautiful evening I have ever spent with such a beautiful young woman. She is stunning and I am proud of her.”

Rishi Munga went on to say “This breath-taking young lady you have been admiring ladies and gentlemen; this young lady who has spent the whole evening drinking champagne and dancing with me is my daughter, Indra. There is cause for celebration. She came out first on the Science Side of the Higher School Certificate examinations. She has got a seat at Edinburgh University to do medicine and will soon leave for her studies. We are celebrating her success.”

The diners froze for a few seconds not knowing what to do. They then clapped their hands very loud, stood up and shouted “Congratulations.”

Indra was embarrassed and dribblets of sweat started to fall down her temples. Rishi held her tight. “Let us have our last glass of champagne before I settle the bill and go back home.” What a memorable evening not only for father and daughter but for all the diners in the hotel. They all took part in the joy of Rishi and Indra.

They left the restaurant after midnight. Indra was tipsy, her tongue was heavy and she was tired. She tried to keep her eyes open but could not. She fell on the lap of her dad and



was sound asleep until they reached home. Her father gently woke her up and said “Indra, you are too big for me now. I cannot carry you upstairs as I used to do when you were small. I will help you to climb the stairs.”

Rishi helped Indra to her room, put her in bed. Took off her shoes and did his best to pull down her evening dress. He then covered her with a blanket, closed the door and went to his own room.

Indra got up very late the next morning to find a glass of tomato juice, a croissant and two Panadol tablets on a tray on the side table. She smiled, went to the bathroom, had a quick shower and went down to the kitchen with the untouched tray. She saw her dad with the newspapers in front of him and a cup of black coffee in one hand. Her dad did not have the chance to turn around when Indra started to hug him so tightly that the coffee spilled on both on them both. “Eh! Young lady. Let me put down my coffee before all the hugging and the kissing.” Indra thanked her dad profusely and said “thank you, thank you and thank you so much dad. This was the most beautiful and memorable evening I have ever spent.”

Rishi said, “I have spent many nights out dancing and going out with one very special lady, your aunt, but I will never forget this special evening that we had together.”

“Shall we give Lizzy a day off? We can go to the supermarket and I will teach you how to cook. We can then have lunch together on the veranda.”

“No wine please, dad.”

“OK! No wine but I will have a can of cold beer.”

“Why don’t you invite auntie Nishta? This could be a nice family lunch.”

“No! Indra. I really do not know if all the hurt I have done to her has gone. I broke her heart and, in the process, I broke mine as well. It is difficult to put these broken crystals together. Furthermore, if you want to know the truth, I am still in love with her. I have tried to wipe the fantastic memories we had together away but they kept coming back. I had such a great time with her. We were not only in love but had lots of things in common. We discussed politics, international affairs, climate change, gender equality and many other themes that sometimes kept us up all night. I was so happy to see her at your College when your results came out. When the three of us hugged and kissed, I had to hold the temptation of telling her how much I still loved her and she should have been your mother.”

Rishi turned very sad and Indra said “She is my mother! She is the one I talk to when I have problems. Remember she was the one who helped me when I had my period for the first time. She may not be my biological mother but she is my emotional mother, which has lots of value to me.”

Lizzy was too happy to get her day’s off. “Thank you so much Sir, I really appreciate. I have not seen my only daughter and my granddaughter for such a long time. I will spend the day with them.”

“Great! You will not have to take the bus. Indra and I are going to the supermarket and I will drop you on our way. Here is some money. Please do get some chocolate for your granddaughter.”

Father and daughter were like two lovers in the supermarket. Fortunately, people knew them and just smiled at their happiness.

Once at home, Rishi put an apron and tied one around Indra’s waist and said “let me see what this young lady is capable of doing.”

All Indra could do was acting as a helper, cutting onions, herbs and vegetables under the guidance of her dad.”

They made a beautiful butter chicken, salad and steamed basmati rice.

They sat on the veranda, enjoyed their delicious lunch and discussed the preparation for Indra’s departure to Edinburgh. Then Indra said “you have shown the quality of a great chef. Where did you learn to cook? I have seen you in the kitchen only to have breakfast on your own.”

“The most delicious home cooking was done when I was at your aunt’s place. We cooked together and had the most fantastic evenings. I used to go to her flat quite often. She did all the shopping on her own as we did not want people to know that we were together. I did all the shopping for wine. She taught me how to cook the most delicious and simple food. We drank the best red wine, discussed and very often I stayed overnight. She gave me a copy of the keys to her flat

which I still have. I still regret not challenging my parents when they decided, or should I say, forced me to marry your mother. I did not take the defence of your aunt when they said that she was a loose-women and receiving men in her flat. In fact, the man she was receiving in her flat was me. I could not tell them either that I did not return home at night because I was at your aunt's place. Both my father and my mother would have got a heart attack on hearing the news. Yes, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. I should have tried and made the effort to tell them but I did not. And look at me now. I am with a woman I do not love. When you were born we decided to have separate rooms.”

Indra sat on her father's lap and said “I understand dad. Do not be so sad. You must be happy that Auntie Nishta has always been present for me and I know she will continue to act as my mother.”

After the lunch father and daughter cleaned the kitchen and washed the dishes before retiring to their room for a nap.

## **PREPARING TO DEPART**

Prior to her departure for her studies, Rishi asked Indra to accompany him to the bank. They were received by the Bank Manager in his office. The Bank Manager seemed to be a good friend of Rishi Munga.

After all the financial formalities and signature of papers, Indra became the proud owner of her first bank account. The Bank

Manager handed Rishi Munga a thick envelope which Rishi gave to Indra. “This is your departure gift and it will help you to settle down until you open your bank account in Scotland. I have also ordered a “Smile Card” in pounds for you.

The Bank Manager explained the advantage of a “Smile Card” and told them that the card would be ready in three days. “Your daughter will have to come in person to sign for the card. She will also receive a secret pin number that she must keep in a safe place. You can help her in using the card for the first time. The card can be used all over the world. You can also add money on the card from Mauritius.”

“There is enough money on your Smile Card for all your settling-in expenses. But once you open your bank account in Edinburgh, please let me know so that I can transfer money on that account as well.” Rishi told his daughter.

Indra objected. “I have won a scholarship, dad, I should be fine and you know that am very careful with my money. I have even saved from the pocket money you have been giving me. I even helped Kris from time to time when he was broke or when he needed to reimburse his friends.”

Rishi Munga helped his daughter with all formalities for her departure including air tickets. He assured his daughter that he had made all arrangements for one of his friends who lived in London to meet her at the airport. “He will hold a signage with your name. You will stay with him and his family for a couple of days. Once you are ready to travel, he will accompany you by train to Edinburgh. He will help you with

your luggage and to settle in the University campus accommodation. He will see to it if you need different outfits for the Edinburgh weather. He has booked a small apartment near the University campus for a few days so that he can look after you and help with your formalities at the University and with opening your bank account.”

When the “D” day arrived, Indra was petrified and told her dad “I have never taken a plane in my life and now I am travelling on my own to a country that I only know through books and magazines.”

Rishi told his daughter not to worry “My friend in London is a caring man with children of your age. His wife is a British social worker and is doing a great job in his community. You do not have to worry; he will stay with you for as long as you need him. I have asked him to show you around Edinburgh a bit. This is his telephone number and you can call him whenever you need help or advice. You can even go to his place during your holidays. His family will welcome you with open arms. All is settled, Indra. Do not be afraid. Relax. Be calm. You will be fine. You are an independent young girl. You grew up all by yourself except for the little support I gave you. In a sense although you did not get all the love and care you should have been given, this has helped you to become a strong and independent woman.”

Indra’s mother decided that she had important things to do on the day of Indra’s departure. In the morning she gave Indra a quick kiss on the cheek. Wished her good luck. She did not

even ask her daughter about her packing and instead said “the maid is here to help you. I have an important appointment”.

With these words she left the house.

Rishi Munga and the maid helped Indra with her suitcase and the books she wanted to carry with her. “Do not take too many clothes and books, Indra. People in Scotland do not dress as we do in Mauritius and as for the books you will get better ones. You will be amazed by the size of the bookshops and there is also the University Library. Do not load yourself with things that you will have to throw away.”

The maid on the other hand had prepared a bag full of Mauritian goodies. Fish ‘vindaye’ (pickles), vegetable pickles, chutneys, spices, chapattis, salted fish, packets of tea, Chamarel coffee to name a few.

“This is so nice of you Lizzy. I really appreciate. You should not have bought all this from your salary. But I am sorry I will take only the tea and the coffee. People at the customs might stop me when looking in my suitcase and would wonder about the fishy smell. Furthermore, the pickles and vindaye might spill.”

Lizzy was of course very disappointed and said “my niece who is working in France is always asking for these things. I know how Mauritians miss their Mauritian food.”

“So kind of you Lizzy but I promise to let you know if ever I need Mauritian goodies and I am sure Mr. Munga will get it through to me either by post or through his contacts.”

Both father and daughter left quite early for the airport after the driver had put the suitcase in the boot of the car. “We

want to be ahead of time. I will ask the driver to take us as I do not feel I can drive. I will sit with you at the back of the car to chat with you and make sure that you have taken everything.” Once in the car, Rishi asked Indra to check her handbag again. “Please check your handbag to make sure that all documents are there: passport, tickets, confirmation of admission from the University, money, smile card and your book to read on the plane. This is a long 12hour flight.”

As soon as they had reached the main gate of the airport, they saw somebody rushing towards them. “Oh, so sorry I am late. I had a court case which I thought would never end,” Nishta said before giving Indra a book. “I know we have the same taste for fiction, here is a good Jodie Picoult to keep you company. You will enjoy this one “Perfect match” and will not want to put it down. I love you Indra. You are the daughter I did not get the chance to have.”

Indra hugged and kissed her auntie. “Thank you, auntie! You have always been present for me. You are the mother I have always dreamed to have. Very often I have dreamed that you are my mother and we are doing things together.”

“I do not promise but I will do my best to visit you in Edinburgh, Indra. It is a country that I have fallen in love with. The beautiful lakes, the breath-taking sceneries and the old houses are out of this world. You will enjoy it. The Edinburgh Festival is something not to be missed.” With tears in her eyes she looked at Rishi then Indra and said “So sorry I have clients



for a difficult murder case waiting for me and I cannot hang around any longer.”

“Please auntie, keep in touch with my dad. He loves you so much. His heart bleeds for you. It was not his fault that he could not marry you. He was forced into marrying my mother. Please forgive him. A love like that can never die. I know you love him too and this is why you are still unmarried.” The words just came out like that.

Rishi and Nishta looked at each other with surprise. Nishta could not hold her tears. Rishi brought her to his broad shoulder, held her tight and caressed her curly hair. Tears poured down her cheeks wetting Rishi’s shirt. Then Rishi shook her a bit, looked at her in the face. Nishta’s eyes were red. Rishi said “I do not know what the future has in stock for us, Nishta. It is true I still love you. We had a great time together. You are the person I could have ended my life with. Let us behave like two mature adults and remain good friends. You are my sister-in-law after all. There is no harm for me to visit you from time to time.” Then with a smile, Rishi whispered in her ear “I still have the keys to the flat!”

Nishta could not reply but made the sign yes with her head. She rushed to her car without looking back. Both Indra and Rishi knew she was still crying.

“I am so sorry dad. The words just went out. I did not have any control of what I was saying.”

Rishi remained quiet. He could not talk as his throat was choked with tears. After a few minutes he said “I must thank

you Indra. I do not know if your aunt has forgiven me but you chose the right word to make her understand how difficult it was for me to make the decision of marrying your mother. I am still madly in love with your aunt.”

“I love you dad. I know you have done everything for me. Without your care and support, I would not have been able to win this scholarship. I know things are not working between you and mum and I really appreciate that you are doing your best. I really do not know if I will ever see you again but I promise to keep in touch.”

Rishi Munga could not look his daughter in the face and instead brought her to his chest, kissed her tightly, turned on his heels and went to the car without looking back.

Indra pulled her suitcase and went inside the airport.

She did all the formalities and looked for a little corner to start reading the book her aunt had given her.

Thinking of her mother, Indra had difficulty to concentrate.

Even Jodie Picoult could not take her mind off her mother.

“How can she do that to me? I know she does not love me because she wanted to have a boy, having failed with Kris. But my own mother not coming to the airport is unbelievable. My aunt made it in spite of her busy schedule. I have known too much emotional violence in the hands of my own mother. My father tried to catch up by playing the role of mum and dad. He did his best. But instead of facing all the problems and challenge his wife, he bought peace in a house where nothing was working. In a house where sadness had taken over joy.

My father did not challenge his parents and married a woman he did not love. He could have stood against his parents' wish and let them disown him by marrying a woman he was in love with. He would have had a better life. Nishta, could have been my biological mother and I would have been the happiest girl on earth. My father showed his weakness by not standing to his principles with his parents, with my mother and with my brother, Kris. Instead of bringing Kris to task he paid for bails so many times to get him out of prison. By doing so he did him a disservice. My childhood was filled with joy and beauty thanks to my dad and my aunt but it was also filled with dread and horror because of my mother. I have too many bad souvenirs where discrimination is rife because I am a girl; I will never return to Mauritius. My aunt has promised to visit me. My dad too can do the same thing if they want to spend quality time with me," Indra told herself.

Still reflecting on her childhood, she heard the announcement to board.

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## **SHASTI IN HOSPITAL**

Indra tried to hold her mother's hand again. She talked to her in a soft voice with lots of love. She asked her if she was suffering. Very softly she told her "having cancer is quite common now and lots of women have this problem. You will have to undergo a small operation and everything will be fine

afterwards. Lots of women live with only one breast. This does not mean that you will no longer be a woman and that you will lose your dignity. At your age you will not bear children and will not have to breastfeed. Why are you so reluctant to have an operation?" She talked to her mother without even realising that she herself did not have the chance of being breastfed. "If you wish I can help with an artificial breast implant once everything is over and you are completely healed."

At this stage, Shasti felt too weak to prevent Indra from holding her hand. She let go. At the same time a nurse came in with a morphine injection.

Indra explained to the nurse that she was a medical Doctor and had her practice in Scotland. She told the nurse that if she had no objection, she would like to administer the injection herself. The nurse agreed but told Indra to keep it a secret as she might lose her job. Indra administered the injection with lots of love, care and precaution as if she was administering an injection to a baby. Her mum said "you have a good hand; this is the first time that it does not hurt when I am being injected."

This was the first time in her life that Indra heard her mum saying something nice to her. She was so used to her mother being cruel and rude to her that she did not know how to react. She could not find her words. "Do not worry I have come back to look after you. I will do your injection myself."

Indra took out her hair brush from her bag and combed her mother's hair with lots of care, arranged her nightdress properly and put some lipstick on her. She rearranged the bedsheets and kissed her softly. "See how beautiful you are. I have to go now. Dad is waiting for me downstairs. I will come and see you every day. "

As soon as they reached home, Indra asked her dad for permission to make a long-distance call. She called her colleague and they had a long conversation. She talked in such a low voice that her dad did not know what she was talking about.

Indra visited her mother at the hospital every single day until the day of the operation. On the day of the operation Indra told her dad that she would stay with her mother in the hospital until she was back on her feet. "I have brought all my personal belongings with me including my laptop. I will be fine staying with her."

Rishi and Indra went early to the hospital. They kissed Shasti and told her. "You have the best surgeon and all will go well." Indra accompanied her mother to the door of the operation theatre. A nurse told her she was not allowed to go inside with the patient. "Do not worry, all will go well. She has the best surgeon and we will look after her," the nurse kindly said.

Father and daughter sat outside the operation theatre. Rishi got up once or twice to stretch his legs. He went to the hospital coffee shop brought two hot cappuccinos. "Take this Indra, you have not eaten anything since this morning."

Indra smiled. "You are always so caring dad and treating me like a child. I have telephoned auntie to tell her about mum's operation."

"Did she say she was coming!"

"No! she just asked how the operation went and I said she was still in the operation theatre."

The surgeon came out after nearly two hours. He told them that the operation was successful before adding "as you know it was a large cancer. Before doing this operation, we tried radiation therapy as well as chemotherapy and hormone therapy but unfortunately nothing worked. We did a mastectomy. We removed nearby lymph nodes. She will still need targeted therapy for some time until we are sure that everything is under control. I will ask the nurse to give you some information for home recovery but for now Madam Munga will have to stay in the hospital until we remove the drain. Please rest assured that I will see her twice a day during the three weeks she will be in hospital. But please do not remove the bandage when you go home. We will look into that after her post operation visit with us."

Both Indra and Rishi Munga thanked the Surgeon. Shashti was then taken to her room followed by a nurse who stayed with her until she opened her eyes.

Indra talked to her mother and told her that everything went well but she would have to stay in the hospital for at least three weeks. "Do not worry I have taken all my personal belongings and will stay with you for the first two nights. After

these two nights I promise to come every day until you are ready to come home.”

Indra kept her promise and stayed with her mother although Shasti had a personal nurse. Rishi went to see his wife on and off and on one occasion he bumped into Nishta coming out of room 606. Instead of going to see his wife Rishi invited Nishta to lunch at the hospital canteen.

## **NEWS FROM SCOTLAND**

Shasti was under heavy medication and slept most of the time. During this time Indra skyped her colleague in Edinburgh. She caught up with all the news at the surgery. She also kept abreast with Scottish news through the Herald newspaper which she read on line.

While going through the newspaper, a headline which read “daughter of a high-profile judge subject of domestic violence” struck her. She immediately thought of her patient Amy Dawson.

She called Amy on messenger to ask if the article referred to her.

“Yes, indeed. But you know how the media is. This is sensationalism at its best. Give me your e-mail address and I will give you all the details.”

The messenger conversation was soon followed by a long e-mail from Amy Dawson.

*Dear Dr Munga*

*First of all, let me thank you for all the advice you gave me when I came to see you in your surgery on that fatal day. I apologise I did not give you any news. I became the paparazzi target of the media. It has been a very difficult period with the media following me and my dad like they were hungry for news. We became their preys. Some headlines read “Judges’ daughter subject to domestic violence”; “sister of brilliant lawyer under protection order”; “Judge Dawson and his wife at the rescue of their daughter”; “The poor and the rich”; “power will win”, and on and on.*

*I followed your advice. When I left your surgery, I went to the police to file a complaint for domestic violence. My husband was faster than me and made a complaint that I fell down the stairs and refused to go to the hospital. He told the police that he urged me to accompany him to either the hospital or a clinic but I refused. And now he did not know where I was. The police took his complaint knowing too well that he was lying as they had seen so many cases like that in their career. What a cheek?*

*The police were ever so nice. I was taken in a private room and two female police officers in uniform questioned me on what had happened. I gave them all the details. I showed them all the bruises and they said that they would take immediate action. They said that they would start to prepare a case for prosecution. They also asked questions on my husband’s behaviour during the five years we had been married. I told*



*them everything and even about the girl I thought he was raping in our own bedroom. They said that they would send a patrol officer to the house to monitor the movements of my husband and to make sure that he did not follow me. When they asked me if I needed a protection order or any psychological support to help with the traumas, I told them that I was going to my parents' place in Glasgow. They then said that they would assign a specialised police officer to work on the case and then send the report to the police in Glasgow. I gave them the address of my parents. They were quite surprised when they saw the names of my parents. They said they knew the reputation of Judge Dawson as well as that of his son.*

*When the police questioned Ben Richard, he said I was lying as I fell down the stairs. He even said he could take me to court and he would prove his innocence.*

*The matter went to court quite fast. My father suggested that instead of my brother, somebody else should defend me. But my brother took a whole team of investigative lawyers who went to Edinburgh to interview the girls at Ben's office. They also interviewed Ben's friends in Glasgow.*

*Ben was found guilty on all counts including raping young girls and quid pro quo harassment in the workplace. As a CEO he kept on saying to the girls that if they gave him, sex they would be promoted. He threatened them that if ever they talked, he would say that he was a victim and they encouraged him to have sex with them to get their promotion.*

*Unfortunately, not a single girl had filed a complaint and this is how he got away with murder and kept on harassing the girls. When the private investigators appointed by my brother interviewed the girls at the office, they all said they were prepared to testify against him. This was a chance of a lifetime they said after all the sufferings they had endured. My brother promised the girls that he would help them with their complaints and make sure that they get all the psychological and emotional support as well as appropriate compensation. I was so sorry for my in-laws. They were devastated when the news came out. Ben's father stopped going to work as he was so ashamed of what his son had done. His mum stopped receiving her friends. They stayed inside the house. My parents went to see them to find out if they needed help. Both my mother and father advised them for counselling and told them it was not their fault. How could they have guessed that their son was a perpetrator?*

*My only hope is that they get over this traumatic situation. When my parents met with them, they could not stop crying and apologised profusely not only for what Ben had done to me but to the other young girls. "He is a beast. How could we have produced such a beast? We have done everything for him. All our savings went to him." they said.*

*I have filed for divorce. With the help of my mother, I am looking into the formalities of opening a centre for victims and survivors of sexual abuse. I do not even have to rent a place as my parents have agreed that I use my flat. The survivors will*

*have a discreet place and a good space to talk openly. My mother has agreed to offer psychological help and my brother has agreed to give them legal support. I am sure it will work as there is a need for people to break the silence as well as a need for group therapy. Sorry, this is a long e-mail but when you return to Edinburgh, I will tell you more.*

*Once again thank you for all your care, support and advice  
Amy”*

*Indra sent an e-mail to congratulate Amy and said that she did not realise that things would move so fast. “You came to see me before I left for Mauritius. You have indeed taken control of your life. I am so happy that you will help other people as well as yourself to become strong and to talk.”*

*Amy replied back “I might need psychological help myself not because I have been through domestic violence but because I keep on seeing this young girl with tears in her eyes, being raped and imploring me for help. The grief on her face begging me for help haunts me day and night. But her case as well as my own sufferings have helped me to become strong and to love and care for the vulnerable.”*

*“Think positive Amy. Your experience will help thousands of women.”* was Dr. Munga’s reply.

## **KRIS**

After three weeks in hospital, Shasti accompanied by a nurse, her husband and her daughter returned home.

Both Indra and her mother were surprised not to see Kris waiting at the door.

Once Shasti was well settled in her room, Indra asked her dad, “Does Kris know that mum is returning home today? He is nowhere to be found.”

“Yes, he knows but he needs permission to come and see her,” was the reply of the father.

With a firm voice, Indra said: “What do you mean by permission dad? Kris has always been doing things his own way. He has never asked for permission. Do you mean that he has a permanent job after being sacked from all the good jobs you found for him? I am so happy that he is now in control of his life. At his age it was about time that he stands on his feet.”

“Yes, I guess one could say that. He is learning a new trade outside the town,” was the reply.

“Good for him! I thought he would never change.” Indra said.

In a low voice, Rishi Munga said to her daughter that they must all keep their fingers crossed so that Kris kept growing in his new environment.

Shasti heard the whole conversation and in a weak voice said: “This is really good news coming out of hospital hearing that my *beta* is learning and working. What kind of work does he do? Why does he have to ask for permission to come home?”

Rishi told his wife that Rishi was learning a trade and as he was working a bit far from Curepipe, he had been asked to stay close to his place of work.

“Do not worry Shasti!” Rishi said before adding that Kris had a clean room with all the basic necessities. He shared bathroom and toilet with four other boys of his age. All the residents had to do their own cooking and Kris was learning fast. Rishi explained how this little community worked with the Manager who did the shopping and together with the Manager they prepared the menu for the week. In the evening they watched television and at least twice a week they had professionals giving them lectures on how to improve the quality of their work.

“He is doing very well and is learning fast. You must be proud of him, Shasti. You will be surprised to see how much he has changed when he comes to visit. He might even cook something for you. Have some rest now.” Rishi told his wife in a caring voice.

Rishi Munga then asked his daughter to accompany him to the living room.

Father and daughter sat on the sofa and holding Indra’s hand, Rishi Munga said: “I am like you Indra, I never thought that Kris would change until this fatal day when the police came knocking at the door with a warrant. This happened when I was already in a turmoil taking your mother for her treatment and trying to get an appointment for the operation.”

“When the police came, Lizzy opened the door and got the fright of her life. She had never been face-to-face with police officers. She was in fits and started to cry. With tears rolling down on her cheeks, she told the police officers that she never stole the pair of diamond earrings of your mother. *“I have a family”* she said and *“I do not want you to put me behind bars. I am telling you the truth. You can search my house. You can also go to my daughter’s house. She lives in the outskirts of Curepipe. I will give you the address.”*

Rishi Munga got up. Put his hands behind his back. Walked slowly to the window. He looked at the blossoming flowers in the garden and said “Poor Lizzy! How unfair that she had to go through this turmoil. Fortunately, your mother was in hospital when the police came. When I heard all the sound of Lizzy crying and screaming, I ran down the steps and saw two police officers looking at me. Lizzy was like a mad woman turning around, pulling her hair, beating herself. She told the police officers how she was an honest woman and had never stolen anything. She even added that her son in law was following evening classes to become a lawyer. This is something I did not know, myself. I asked Lizzy to stop shouting so that I could talk to the police officers. They showed me the warrant. I was obliged to let them inside the house. They said that they had come to search Kris’ room. They turned the room upside down. Looked in all the drawers, tore the mattress, looked in the toilet/bathroom but did not find anything. It was horrible

seeing all the mess there were doing. Before leaving they told me that Kris was in prison.”

One of the police officers told Mr. Munga that they could not do otherwise as Kris had criminal records having been caught with drugs and misbehaving in night clubs.

The Police Officer went on to explain that during a police patrol in the outskirts of Curepipe they found him selling drugs to school children.

“I was shattered when I heard that, Indra. I knew he was taking drugs but selling drugs to innocent children was beyond my understanding. I guess this happened when I stopped giving him money. I also put all my money as well as the jewellery of your mother in the safe. The sad thing is that your mother knew that Kris was not only stealing money but Kris stole her earrings that she left on the bedside table. I saw her looking for her earrings everywhere in the house but she did not blame Kris. Instead, she said that there were so many employees in the house that it was difficult to know who the thief was. Kris must have sold the earrings to buy and sell drugs. Your mother never questioned him.”

Indra got up from the sofa, went to the window and put her head on her father’s back.

Rishi Munga told Indra how he went to prison to see Kris. “Can you imagine? The CEO of a large corporate going to see his son in prison. Kris looked like somebody else as if he needed a good bath and a good shave. I have never seen him cry but he did when he saw me. He begged me to get him out of this

place. My heart ached when I saw him in the prisoner's uniform. But at the same time, I told myself that a tough life would serve him right. He also talked about the horrible food with lentils full of grime and pilchards cooked in rotten tomatoes. He said he was prepared to change his behaviour and even prepared to go for technical studies in any Institute of my choice. But all he wanted was to get out of prison. I told him that I was prepared to help him but he should sign a paper. The paper said that he agreed to go for rehabilitation. I also got him to sign the admission form of the rehabilitation centre which I had with me. I then did all the administrative and judiciary procedures to bail him out. I had to take a lawyer and the matter went to court. You can imagine how humiliating this was for me. You aunt got the news from her colleagues and kindly offered her help but I could not accept. There was even one article in the media saying "the son of CEO of a large company found with drugs and is now in jail." "This is where your brother is now. In a Rehabilitation Centre for people dependent on drugs and alcohol. The programme at the Rehabilitation Centre is very tough. They use new techniques to wean people off drugs. They have a variety of programmes and new methods including self-motivation. They are taught how not to associate with friends who are still on addictive substance. They have to learn new habits and new behaviour. They have to do their own washing and cooking. Daily counselling is also part of the programme. Counsellors help them to know themselves better and make them



understand how using addictive drug affect not only the person but the whole family and society at large.”

Being a medical doctor, Indra, listened with great interest. His dad then explained how a social worker from a Non-Governmental Organisation went to the Centre three times a week for group therapy. The residents talked about themselves and how they started taking drugs. All residents are followed by psychologists and psychiatrists. “I believe Kris is weaning out now. I went to see him once. I also attended a group therapy with other parents. These young boys are now learning how to reconstruct themselves. In fact, the Centre is like a micro society where they have to learn everything from personal hygiene to behaviour in public and in society. I never thought that one day I would find myself reading books and articles on drug addiction instead of my normal reading on the global economy. I want to know more so that I can help him when he comes out of rehab. I have talked to the Director of the Centre and he will be given permission to visit your mother. He will of course be accompanied by a social worker. We will have to tell your mother that his traineeship does not allow him to stay overnight but he will return home after he has become a good professional which is true as he is learning how to make furniture.”

Rishi Munga added with a smirk on his face: “Maybe next time you come to Mauritius you will see Kris’ furniture in the house!”

“Let me tell you, Indra, that without the support of you aunt, I would have gone mad. I nearly went through a depression. The pressure was too much for me to bear on my own with your mother being sick all the time and Kris with all his mischiefs. He even brought girls in the house a couple of times. I did not know about that until Lizzy told me that she was finding it difficult to clean Kris’ room with used condoms all over the place.”

“You have the keys to auntie’s flat. You could have gone there from time to time,” Indra replied.

“I did even better, Indra. My company opened a branch in Mozambique and it was the chance of a lifetime for me and Nishta to be together. This is where we met, in a small bungalow on the beach. From there we went on holidays in other African countries. We enjoyed ourselves going on safaris, climbing mountains, surfing and rowing. We rented self-catering bungalows in the forests and at night we tried the local food in typical African restaurants. We were like a couple on honeymoon having a fantastic time together. We have promised not to leave each other.”

“It was about time that you enjoy your life, dad”, Indra said. “I am so happy for you. You work hard and have made lots of sacrifices for your family. It has not been easy especially with Kris. You have taken the right decision and found a solution outside gossiping Mauritius.”

## **INDRA AT THE BED OF HER MOTHER**

A nurse was employed full time during the convalescence of Shashti but Indra insisted of helping her mother with her personal hygiene and with her diet. She advised her mother to get lots of rest, advised her on the management of chest pain, armpit discomfort and general pain and when to take pain killers. She gave her mother sponge bath and told her that she would be given a full bath with the approval of the doctor. She helped her mother with light arm exercises every day to prevent stiffness and to keep the arm flexible.

When the bandage was removed, Shasti held her tears. “Look at me. I have only one breast. How am I going to wear my choli when we go out?”

Indra held her mother’s hand tight and told her “Do not worry. Once your scar has healed and you have finished with radiotherapy I will have a permanent prosthesis made for you. I will also make sure that you get proper bras to fit the breast.”

It was only in her sickness and during her convalescence that Shasti started to understand the sufferings of others. She tried to understand why she had been so cruel on her daughter, why so much suffering, why so much pain on her own flesh and blood. She kept reflecting upon herself. Psychological and emotional sufferings became worse than her physical sufferings. One day she decided to let go and to

talk to her daughter. The pains that her daughter had endured because of her were too much to bear anymore.

She asked her daughter for forgiveness. "I hope it is not too late for you to forgive me, Indra. I really regret what I have done to you and I apologise profusely. From now on I would like to have a better relationship with you. I hope you will give me this chance."

She took Indra's hand and started to cry. This was the first time Indra saw her mother crying. She hugged Indra and told her how her mother was not happy when she was born. "My mother was expecting a boy after having given birth to a girl. But, fortunately for me, compared to my sister I am have a fair skin and my parents were proud to have a child fair in colour." Shasti told her daughter what happened to her when she had her period for the first time. "I did not even know that it was my period. Fortunately, between friends at school we talked a lot and my best friend had her period before me and she explained everything to me."

"What about your sister, Nishta? She must have had her period before you." Indra enquired.

"I was never close to my sister. Nishta was considered the black sheep of the family. She went through difficult times after I was born with fair skin. She was dark with curly hair and I was fair with long silky hair. Our relatives used to call her "Mazanbik" (Mozambican looking). One of our aunts even dared to ask her if she was not ashamed of being so dark as if it was her fault for being dark. When I was invited to birthday

parties my friends used to tell me that they did not mind if I brought along my black sister. Some people even thought she was the daughter of the maid.”

“And yet I was jealous of her. She was always on top of her class. She read a lot and knew her body better than me. Yes, she did explain what was happening to my body when I had my period. But she too faced the same discrimination when she had her period. Sanitary towels never figured on the shopping list of our mother and we had to buy them from our own pocket money. I still remember, when I had my period for the first time, how my mother told me I was dirty. She served me my food on the steps of the veranda like a dog. My grandmother came to see me with sweet cakes as was the tradition but refused to kiss me. She spitted when she saw me. She said I was dirty. I suffered a lot. But I should not have done the same thing to you Indra. On the contrary my bad experience should have made of me a better person. I am so sorry. Please forgive me.”

Indra held her mother in her arms. “Let us forget the past mama. Let us build a new future where women will stop suffering. It is not normal that history repeats itself like that”.

## **THE PARTNER**

Mother and daughter hugged so tight that at a certain point Indra could see the pain on the face of her mother. It was not an emotional pain this time but a physical one as the scar had

not completely healed. Indra apologised “I should not have held you so tight mama. You are still in pain.”

Once Indra released her mother, Shasti seized the opportunity of asking. “You are making long distance calls very often and even at the clinic, when I was not sleeping, I could notice you were on Skype. Who is on the other side of the line? If you have somebody in your life I would love to see him before I die. I have noticed the most beautiful diamond ring around your finger. The diamond glows even during the day. I would love to give you and your husband my blessings. This will help me get over all the harm I have done to you. This will help me to be at peace with myself. Indra please let me contribute to your happiness with the man of your life. I would so much love to see my grandchildren”.

During the 18 years or so that Indra was in Edinburgh, not once, in all the cards that she had been sending to her dad, she had told him about the very exceptional person she had met. The cards never mentioned her private or her professional life.

Indra met her friend on the University campus. A friend who was two years her senior doing medicine as well.

The friend was special in many ways. Without this friendship it would have not have been possible for Indra to get over all the psychological and emotional traumas she had endured at the hands of her mother as well as living in a new country with new culture and new tradition. In the beginning her biggest problem was the food culture. But very slowly her friend

introduced her to haggis, porridge, bangers and mash. Indra took her time to get used to this new Scottish food culture. Some of them she could not bear but her most favourite one became fresh salmon.

Indra and her friend worked together in the library until late at night and helped each other with their projects.

The care and support of this friend helped Indra to face the cold weather of Edinburgh with its drizzles, snow and slippery roads. The friend knew where to take her for winter clothing. After two years of friendship they decided to move together. Indra reminisced on the happiness they had known together. Sexual and erotic pleasures. Indra learnt how to make love, how to have an orgasm and most of all how to enjoy sex in all its aspects. Her partner helped her to know her own body, the sensual part of her body. Prior to meeting this friend, Indra always thought that a woman was not supposed to enjoy sex. Indra's body had no secret for her partner. She started to think of the pleasures she had with her partner, the caresses on all parts of her body, the sucking of her nipples; she had goose pimples all over her body and felt the desire of making love to her partner. She wanted to smell her partner.

She told her mother "Mama, I am not married but I am engaged to the most fantastic person on this earth. We celebrated our betrothal a year ago surrounded by good friends around a good meal, lots of champagne in a cozy restaurant outside of Edinburgh. I have taken my decision; I will ask my partner to come to Mauritius. I prefer to tell you

that we live together like a married couple. My partner is also a Specialist and we share the same surgery.”

Indra’s mother got a shock when she heard that her daughter was living with somebody without being married.

Shasti very kindly asked Indra to go and get her dad and to leave the room as she needed to have a private conversation with her husband.

Rishi Munga was not shocked at all when Shasti said “can you believe it our unmarried daughter is living with a man.”

His reply was “So what? In what world are you living? I thought you had learnt a lot from all the magazines you read and the films you watch. Couples live together without getting married and sometimes they do not get married at all and yet have children. Even in Mauritius I know unmarried couples living together. You should be proud that your daughter has a serious relationship.”

In a very affectionate voice Rishi Munga called Indra. “Your mother and I need to talk to you darling.” This was the first time that both husband and wife talked to Indra together.

Rishi said, “Your mother has told me about your relationship. I am so proud of you and I am happy that you have a partner...”

Before Rishi Munga had the time to finish his sentence, Shasti added: “Listen Indra, I do not want people to talk. You are now in Mauritius where gossiping is a high on the list of people especially that your dad is the CEO of a large company. It is better for people to think that this is only a friendly relationship...”



Rishi Munga looked at his wife sharply. Shasti quickly said “Anyway if people want to talk, they will talk and we cannot stop them. We are so happy and at your age it is about time for you to get married anyway. You have to build a family. Look how your dad and I have had a good life together. I hope it will be the same for you. I am sure you have chosen an Anglo-Indian boy. The type of Indian-born British actor like Roshan Seth who turned so many heads in his acclaimed films Gandhi, Mississippi Masala, Not without My Daughter, Beautiful Launderette and so on. The list is too long. I have watched all his films. You will have beautiful children with a dad who is a mixture of British and Indian. I cannot wait to see my future son in law. At long last my dream will come true. I will get the so long desired son, a son who has succeeded in life.”

Indra’s dad added “We have no objection that you stay in the same room. I can even rent a bungalow if you so wish. When you go back to Edinburgh you can then decide on your future and whether you want to get married and have children.”

Both Rishi and Shasti Munga were getting so excited that they did all the talking and Indra could not fit in a word.

In her mind, Shasti had already seen her new son and her mixed-blood grandchildren. “You can even come back to Mauritius so that we can celebrate a traditional Indian wedding with *haldi*, *chowtari* and the whole lot. Once you have taken your decision, we can go to India to buy all your wedding outfits. My parents did all my wedding shopping in

India. There are specialised bridal shops in India. As you are my only daughter, I will give you most of my jewellery. I will only keep some for your brother's wife if he does get married!!!”

Shasti asked her husband to ask for an interior designer and an architect to come and see her so that Indra's room could be refurbished with all possible comforts.

Indra refused and told her mother that she had no problem staying with her partner in her small room. “You are still bed ridden. Why do you have to go into all this trouble? Your health is most important of all.”

Shasti had never taken “no” for an answer. She ordered the latest stylist curtains, linens and towels on line.

During the refurbishment Indra had to sleep in the small guest room which was close to her mother's room.

Instructions were given to the architect to extend the room taking part of the veranda. To turn the shabby bathroom into a state of the art one with a huge bath tub and shower. The single bed was changed into a double one with beautiful bed sheets. A beautiful leather settee was ordered with a coffee table. In one corner of the room a little kitchenette was organised so that the couple could make their own coffee if they wanted to stay in their room late.

It took two full weeks for the refurbishment to be done.

Everything in the room was done with care and attention and fit for a couple on honeymoon. Indra could not believe her eyes when she found the final product and told her mother

how grateful she was. Shasti made a big smile and said: "I will do anything for my actor looking son in law, the *beta* I have always longed for. I have failed with Kris but I never thought you would be the one to give me the so longed-for son. Not any son but a medical doctor!"

During this time Shasti was healing well, finding her strength and the bandage taken out. The Doctor even advised that she could have a bath. Both the nurse and Indra insisted to help her with this first good bath. She felt really well and Indra sat with her on the bed and started to show her models of silicon-breast prosthesis.

When the "D" day arrived, Indra refused her dad's offer to accompany her to the airport. Instead she asked her mother for her personal car. "The car has been sleeping in the garage for quite some time. Just as well you use it, Indra. You can even keep it for as long as you and your partner will be in Mauritius."

On the road to the airport Indra thought of what her mum had told her. "Look how your dad and I have succeeded in life". She laughed and told herself, "All that glitters, is not gold. My dad did everything and let her have her own way. She did not even notice that my dad was unhappy, was suffering in silence and was never at home for lunch or dinner. She does not even know that my dad has another life outside the four walls of his house."

"I am the one who has succeeded in life. I am a specialist; I have a fantastic and well-paid job in the most beautiful city. I

am so happy with my partner. We have known so many great things together. We have known the most fantastic holidays in many exotic places. When travelling we have learnt the cultures of other people and have lived and eaten with the locals. Without my partner maybe, I would never have been able to finish my studies especially during the early years of University when I was depressed. My partner guided me throughout, taught me how to walk without falling, how to make love, real love. Our love is so strong that we cannot live without each other. We have so many things in common. We both work so hard that during weekends we are so happy when we are into each other's arms sitting down in front a fire, having dinner with a good bottle of Pinot Noir, listening to classical music and having good champagne for our desert. My partner not only introduced me to classical music but presented me to the musicians after each concert. We ended up by having the same taste for music and paintings. Our flat is decorated with lots of taste showing love and warmth everywhere. Many people do not understand this love for each other. It is like the fusion of two souls and two bodies. " Reaching the airport, Indra found a parking not far from the main entrance. She rushed to the main gate and saw her partner coming out. They hugged and kissed each other and rolled down some tears. "It has been too long", the partner said. "I thought you would never ask me to come."

Indra replied, “Don’t be stupid. Let me help you with the trolley. Wow! Fortunately, the boot of the car is quite big. Have you brought the whole of Edinburgh with you?”

“Not my fault! Your duty-free shop is so tempting.”

They both laughed while loading the boot of the car.

Once they were seated in the car, they could not stop talking. They caught up with news in the surgery, in Edinburgh and on Shasti’s health. “Indra, you always said that the airport is nothing compared to Heathrow Airport and yet I found a state-of-the-art airport with the most beautiful duty-free shops. I have got some wine and a good bottle of whisky for your dad.”

On reaching the gate of the house they saw both Rishi and Shasti Munga waiting for them with impatience. Shasti held an aarti platter with flowers, camphor and an oil lamp to bless the couple on the doorstep.

Indra stepped out of car followed by a breath-taking woman with dark skin and short black curly hair. An imposing mature, tall woman who walked with lots of assurance and self-confidence. Her silk shirt of ivory colour matched her brown pair of trousers and matching high heel shoes. She surpassed Hall Berry in beauty. Very classy woman that could make the heads of many men swirl.

“Stop the suspense” Shasti said. “Ask our Roshan Seth to stop hiding at the back of the car; I have prepared everything for an aarti to bless you both.”

Indra held the woman tight by the waist and said “This is my Roshan Seth. I have the pleasure in presenting you my partner, my Daisy. We have been together for quite some time. We are officially engaged and are now planning for our wedding. You will of course be invited. Do not worry we have no intention to hold the wedding in Mauritius knowing too well that it is illegal here.”

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