

# *UNLOCKING SECRETS*

**LOGA VIRAHSAWMY**



*For my husband, Dev Virahsawmy,  
who helped me on my spiritual journey.*

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# *PART 1*

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## CHAPTER 1

### ***DISAPPEARED***

On that Sunday morning, Niraj came back home at seven. He spent the whole Saturday night having fun and enjoying himself with his male friends. They had plenty to drink and he even slept with one or two girls who were paid to have fun with them. He could not remember if it was one or two or even three girls. The girls wore strings and were topless while some of the men were completely nude. The Kamasutra could not compete with them in the different sexual gymnastics that they tried with the girls. Niraj and his friends whom he knew from his days at the University met quite often on Saturday nights for their orgies. Their sex parties included at least five males and two to three women who were paid to spend the whole night with them. They engaged in open and unrestrained sexual activities with these women. They hired the same women. Being heavily paid, these women kept their secrets. The orgies took place in the bungalow of one of the mates.

The bungalow was situated in a remote place right in the middle of nowhere surrounded by fir trees and a great variety of palm trees. The front and back of the bungalow had the most impressive endemic plants as well as potted plants that flower all year round.

Rick, the owner of the bungalow being an architect, a landscapist and a designer did wonders to his bungalow both inside and outside. He was passionate about protecting the environment. He knew the names of all the plants and had plate names on some of them.

The bungalow was a one man show as Rick was adamant about employing a gardener. The furniture was made of logs of wood designed in a very rustic style. The walls of the bungalow were made of rocks. The bungalow had all the charming features of a storybook house. The front porch was wide with a big variety of potted plants. Above the garage stood a huge studio facing the mountains and the forest. The studio served as Rick's office. This was where he got all his inspiration for his landscaping work.

The living, dining and kitchen were an open space that led to the back porch. The spacious and well-designed kitchen had room for eating and there was a drinking bar close to one side of the walls. The softened light on top of the wall radiated a pleasant atmosphere that could encourage any guest to indulge in drinking.

All the four en suite bedrooms with attached bathrooms and toilets were upstairs and had their own privacy.

This remote bungalow with all its amenities and luxuries was the ideal place for their Saturday orgies. They picked the girls up in town and bandaged their eyes until they reached their destination. Once inside the house they started to drink and had fun with the girls until late at night and sometimes extending in the early morning hours. The girls were then dropped off to their initial pickup location without even knowing to which place they have been to.

On arriving home, Niraj went straight to bed with his clothes and shoes on. He woke up at 11.00 a.m. took his shower, put on a dressing gown and went straight into the kitchen. The table was not set. There was no Sunday

breakfast which normally consisted of bacon, eggs, sausages, black pudding, baked beans and fried tomatoes on a hot plate grill. He went into a fit and started to shout "woman where is my breakfast. I am hungry. It is nearly 11.30 a.m. and there is no breakfast on the table. What have you been doing the whole morning? The kitchen is still messy from last night's dinner. The sink is full of dirty dishes."

He kept on shouting but there was no reply.

Niraj went into the room of the twins. Their beds were empty. There were no soft toys on the beds. He went to the playroom and could not see a single toy. He proceeded to the garden, looked through the bushes, looked up into the branches of the mango and litchi trees. Nothing!

The girls used to play hide and seek with their mother in the garden. They very often climbed on the branches of a tree. Their mother made up as if she did not see them and pretended that she was leaving them on their own to go out shopping. They knew their mother's trick and instead of coming down the tree they giggled and told her that they were more cunning than her. "OK, you win and I lose", the mother conceded.

Niraj went into the living room and looked under the settee that had just been repaired. The settee was the girl's favourite place to hide, to jump on and to make their mischiefs. In fact, the settee had to be repaired as the girls jumped on it so hard that one of the legs broke.

Still nothing!

After all the searching, Niraj felt there was something wrong as this had never happened before. The side of the bed where his wife normally slept was intact.

He quickly put on his track suit, took his car and went to his in-law's residence. Instead of ringing the brass bell, he knocked at the door forcefully. A strong and nice-looking lady, with blond hair, in her 70s dressed in a classy pair of brown trousers and a silk flowery top opened the door and said: "What are you doing here at this time of the day, Niraj? Why did you not telephone before coming?"

Niraj pointed his finger at the lady and said: "You think I am stupid! Where is she? Why are you hiding her?"

"What do you mean by she, Niraj?"

"My wife, your daughter, the girl that you have spoilt. Where is she? Where are my daughters?"

Audrey was in total confusion. "I do not get you. Can you keep your calm and explain properly why you are looking for your family? Your family should be at home at this time of the day unless Jane has taken them to the swimming pool or the beach. I know she sometimes does that. She prefers to take them to the beach or to a big swimming pool. She finds my swimming pool not big and not deep enough to teach the girls how to swim. Have you telephoned her on her mobile?"

Niraj was so out of his mind. He was in such a fit that he did not even think of telephoning his wife nor taking his own mobile telephone with him.

"If I were you, Niraj, this is the first thing I would have done. Any three-year-old child would have thought of doing that."

Embarrassed, Niraj said: "May I use your mobile phone please. In my hurry I left my telephone at home."

He tried to get his wife several times and each time he was redirected to the voicemail saying "sorry your call cannot get through. Try to call later".

Niraj went red with anger and started to insult his mother-in-law.

"This is what happens when you spoil your daughter. She leaves the house without informing her husband and furthermore I do not know where my daughters are. She did not even leave a note on the table. Maybe she has a secret life and went to spend the night with a man. I will find out and this will be the end of her. She cannot do that to my daughters. What kind of mother is she? Going to see her lover with my two baby girls."

"Niraj, stop it now. You are going a bit far. Why don't you reflect on yourself a bit and see what kind of life you have given to my daughter? She is a great professional and has a better job than you. She earns twice as much as you. And yet after a few years of marriage, she started to go through hell. She never told her dad or me anything but as caring parents we could see how unhappy she was. I turned a blind eye when I saw the blood clots on her arms and legs. She tried to cover them by wearing long sleeve shirts and pants. She stopped wearing shorts. I knew there was something wrong. Once when I saw her swollen cheek, I asked her what



had happened and she said she fell from a chair and hit her face on the table. I am a mother, Niraj, and I know what my daughter is going through with you. Jane is our only child and she has been raised to be an independent young lady. When she said she was in love with you and wanted to get married we did not object. But little did we know that after a few years of marriage she would be so miserable. Krishna and I discussed a lot. We confronted Jane but she kept on denying. Yes, maybe she thought that with the twins the marriage could be saved but it went from bad to worse.”

Audrey then advised his son in law to go to the beach in Flic-en-Flac where Jane took the children from time to time to teach them how to swim in the sea. “Go and look for your wife and daughters there instead of thinking that she has a lover.”

“If you cannot see her there, please do let me know. I will call Krishna so that a proper search can be done. I know Krishna, sometimes, takes the children with him when he visits his constituents in the North. Maybe you are not aware but going out with their granddad is of great excitement not only to the girls but to the old man. Krishna very often took them to see fishermen coming back in their boats with their bamboo cage full of fish. Jenny and Jinny jumped all over the place watching the live fish jumping all around. The fishermen let them touch the fish and the girls decided what fish to buy. How do you think you have all this beautiful fish on your table? Your daughters and your father in law must be thanked for that. Now, that I think of it, may be Jane took the girls to “Roy for Joy”. The girls like helping the

elderly doing their planting in the therapeutic garden. I know the therapists let them swim with the elderly. But I wonder if she went there as today is Sunday and the therapists do not work.”

Audrey then assured Niraj that her husband could not have taken the girls with him.

“He would have informed both you and Jane. Furthermore, he had important business to discuss with one of his political agents.”

Krishna’s main political agent, Dhanraj, was on the brink of a divorce and wanted to discuss the matter urgently with him. Dhanraj was Krishna’s best political agent and did all the groundwork which led Krishna Roy to win a landslide victory in his constituency. When Dhanraj telephoned Krishna with all his domestic problems, Krishna did not want to let him down. In view of the sensitivity of the matter he did not want to discuss the problem on the telephone nor take the girls with him. He wanted to see for himself what was happening as he knew the couple with their three children really well. In fact, Krishna was the one who helped the boy to get admitted at the Hotel School. He helped Dhanraj financially by taking charge of the boy’s transport as well as all his materials for his courses.

Dhanraj’s dilemma was with his 18-year-old girl who fell in love with the son of the neighbour. Dhanraj was dead against this relationship although the boy was economically independent. The eldest daughter, aged 20, was working in a factory making shirts for export. The bone of contention was that a young sister could not get

married before the eldest one. For Dhanraj this would bring shame on the family and the eldest one would not find a husband. Dhanraj's wife on the other hand did not agree with her husband and believed in the happiness of her children. She was against arranged marriage and told her husband so. Matters got sour as Dhanraj felt he had lost control of his authority as the man of the house. He threatened his wife and told her to return to her parent's house with the children.

Niraj did not even listen to his mother-in-law saying. "I am expecting your call Niraj. I do not want to disturb Krishna in his work but once we hear from you, we will decide on the course of action."

Instead of going to Flic-en-Flac as advised by his mother-in-law, Niraj went straight home, ate a sandwich and went to bed.

At about five in the afternoon he heard the doorbell. "Again, this is not possible. This woman has been gallivanting taking my two small children with her and had forgotten to take the keys of the house."

The doorbell rang for a few seconds, then he heard a loud knock on the door. "My goodness, what kind of woman is that. She now thinks she is the boss of the house. I will give her a lesson that she will not forget." He took his belt that was on the chair and went to open the door.

Instead of his wife it was Krishna Roy on the doorstep saying in an angry voice "Hello Niraj. I guess my daughter is back since you did not telephone as advised by your mother-in-law."

Knowing the position of Mr. Roy in society not only as a politician but as a businessman, Niraj could not find his words and started to stammer. "No, no...no... Sir I did not look for her as I thought she would come back on her own as she has two small girls with her."

"You better move your ass and go and look for my daughter and my two grandchildren. I suppose you know her friends and her colleagues better than I do. If my daughter is not back by tonight, not only you will be on the street but I will file a case of domestic violence against you. I do not have to remind you that the roof under your head belongs to Jane. Let me also remind you that I gave my daughter this house with all its furniture and amenities as her wedding gift. I know you have not done any repairs or upgrading to the house as you know the house will never be yours. Fortunately, Jane agreed with me on your matrimonial regime which is under the separation of property."

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## CHAPTER 2

### ***THE ADOPTED CHILD***

Compared to Jane Roy, Niraj Boyjoo came from a modest family. His mum and his dad loved him and he grew up with lots of care and affection. He had a happy, safe and secured life and had no problem of being an adopted child. Niraj never asked about his biological parents. On the contrary, when people asked him how he felt about being adopted he kept on telling them: "I am so happy. My parents chose me and love me to bits. How can I ask for more?"

After five years of marriage the Boyjoos could not have any children however hard they tried. They did fertility treatments but in vain. Finally, both Anil and Sarita decided to go for adoption. They did not want to adopt a Mauritian child although they were well aware that there were hundreds of abandoned babies in the country. Mothers leaving their babies in hospital beds and disappeared; children in orphanage; battered children or sexually abused children who had to be taken away from families. They were afraid of taking a baby who would later ask to be returned to his/her parents or a mother in search of her child or even biological parents blackmailing them to get back their child.

The Boyjoos preferred to go through an official channel in India. They researched a lot and came across an organisation where children throughout India were admitted to the orphanage either through abandonment of birth parents or left on the streets. The organisation provided for domestic as well as international adoption.

Children in that orphanage were healthy as they received all medical care, a balanced diet and education.

Anil and his wife had to travel to India more than twice to complete the in-country process through an agency. They had to show proof that they were financially, physically and emotionally stable. They had to give copies of their medical reports confirming that they did not have any life-threatening conditions.

After all their papers were approved by the agency, the Boyjoos went to India to choose their baby. A staff from the agency accompanied them to the orphanage to find a baby corresponding to their wishes. As soon as they saw this two-month-old baby, their hearts went for him. When Sarita held the baby in her arms, the baby held her fingers tight and did not want to let go. The baby did the same when Anil took the baby in his arms. With one voice both Anil and Sarita said "this is our long-awaited baby." They did all the formalities, signed all the papers and took their bundle of joy back with them to Mauritius. Once in Mauritius they went through all the legal procedures for the baby to have a birth certificate.

Niraj was the pride of his parents and his school. He won national prizes in football and quiz competitions. He was so articulate in Creole, French and English that his school chose him whenever students were asked to talk in public forums. After his Higher School Certificate, he won a scholarship to study in the University of his choice. He chose the University of Bristol as a few of his friends were going there. After his second year at the University he joined the Students Union and became the Chairperson. During his term of office, he organised a

variety of cultural events. He even set up a football team so that they could play against other Universities. With all the cups that they won, Bristol University became a reference.

While doing his third year, news from home became scarce. He wrote to his mother regularly but the replies were short and did not say much. He felt that there was something wrong at home as his parents always kept him abreast of everything. Niraj had the chance to do his Masters but preferred to return home to see for himself the problems at home.

At the airport, he could hardly recognise his mother who had lost all her vitality and was as thin as a rake. "Why are you on your own? Where is dad?"

"I will explain when we do back home," his mother said in a broken voice.

On reaching home, his dad was nowhere to be found.

"Where is dad?"

He started shouting like a child. "Dad, where are you? I am too big for surprises now. Stop hiding and come and give me this hug I have been waiting for so long."

No reply!

"Stop shouting Niraj, your father is not here."

"But he should be waiting for me. This is not like him at all."

"Do not worry Niraj. He is busy with his work and will come to see you later."

Anil came to see his son in the late afternoon. They hugged each other and Anil said:

"I have brought you a Glenmorangie that I bought from the duty-free shop. I know this well acclaimed whisky which has incredible smoothness, richness and intriguing complexity is too expensive to buy in Mauritius. We will have a drink together before dinner. I am sure mum have made my favourite curry and parathas. What do you think dad?"

"No, I am sorry, Niraj, I am busy and have other important matters to attend to. I cannot join you for dinner."

"You mean I am not important?"

"Now, do not put words in my mouth, Niraj. I never said that." Anil replied raising his voice.

"Oh! My God you are hot tempered. I have never seen you like that. What has happened during these three years I was not with you?"

Very slowly Sarita put her two palms on the table, stood up and said: "It is about time that all the lies and secrets are revealed. I can no longer hide the truth. Be honest with your son and with yourself and tell him the whole truth. Tell him what has happened during his absence. No, sorry, not only during his three-year absence but before he left for University."

Niraj was in a state of disbelief. "Dad, you have never lied to me. I always thought I was living in a happy home. You both looked after me so well. Please, tell me what is happening."



“OK son. First of all, let me tell you that I will always love you. You are my first child and will always be.”

“What do you mean by first child? Do you have other children?”

Anil bent his head and said: “I have had a secret life since you turned fifteen. I fell in love with one of my colleagues in my office. At the beginning we thought it was only a strong friendship and went out for drinks together. I always returned home to have dinner with you and your mother. But one day when you were on your football tour, I decided to book a bungalow so that Lisa and I could at least spend the night together. I told your mother that we had a team building for all staff of the office in a hotel with a sleep over and I would stay at the hotel. She believed me. I was so much in love with Lisa that I finally decided to rent an apartment so that Lisa and I could be together after work. After two years, Lisa told me that she was pregnant and would go for an abortion. I refused and told her that I would talk to her parents. By then it was time for you to go for your studies. It was easier to take a decision during your absence as I did not want to upset you. I decided to tell your mother about all my lies and my secrets. I also told her that I had plans to go and live with Lisa. Our four-year-old girl is gorgeous, Niraj. You must see her.”

Sarita started to cry softly and in a trembling voice she said: “When your father started to come back home late at night, I felt sorry for him. I told him that there was no need for him to do any overtime as you were a bright boy and will surely get a scholarship or even if you did not get a scholarship we could afford for your studies in

India or Malaysia. It did not cross my mind that he had a mistress. I never thought that your father could be so ruthless. On the very day that you left for your studies your father left me with all my sorrow and tears of your absence. He left the house to go and live with his mistress and their daughter who was one year old then. He is now asking for a divorce."

Niraj jumped from his chair and pointed his finger at his father. "How can you do that to mum? How can you do that to me? You always said that you have been blessed with mum and me in your life. How is it possible that you had an affair with a girl much younger than you? It is difficult for me to digest that you have a child with your mistress. You are heartless!"

"Please, listen Niraj. This does not mean that I love you less. I love Lisa and my daughter is stunning. I cannot take her out of my mind even when I am working. She is so bubbling and full of life. She has now started pre-primary school."

Anil took out his mobile telephone to show Niraj a picture of his daughter but Niraj refused to look. Instead he told his father to leave the house. "You have the cheek to show me her picture. Leave the house. I need to digest this news. Let me sort myself out after this long flight and this horrendous news."

After two days Anil returned for a man to man talk with Niraj. "You want a divorce. OK, I have talked to mum and she has agreed. I have also promised her that I will look after her until I die unless she dies before me of course. What are your plans for the house? Are you

going to throw us out in the streets and give the house to your beloved daughter? “

“This is certainly not my intention Niraj. I will make arrangements with my lawyer so that the house belongs to your mother and when she dies the house will belong to you. I will give her a monthly pension.”

“To hell with your pension. With my qualifications, I am sure I can get a good job with a decent salary. In fact, while finishing my degree I looked for jobs in Mauritius and have been offered one or two. It is only a question of going to interviews. We do not need your money. We accept the house as you were not the only one who bought it. In fact, mum is the one who did all the renovation and upgrading to make this house a beautiful home.”

On these words, Niraj opened the door to show Anil out.

Niraj kept his promise and looked after his mum who went through an arduous journey. Niraj thought his mum was suffering because of all the afflictions she had endured. She kept on saying that Anil left because of her own fault as she could not give him a biological child.

The pains became unbearable. Sarita insisted that it was a gastric problem as she was suffering a lot from heartburn. She changed her diet to that of boiled vegetables and plenty of papaya but the situation got worse day by day. Niraj noticed that her mum started to have abdominal pain followed by nausea. She became so fragile that she could hardly stand on her feet. She had difficulty in swallowing and was vomiting a lot. Niraj

suggested to take her to a Doctor. She refused and said she was on ayurvedic medication and she should be fine.

One day when Niraj came back home from work he saw his mum on the floor in her own vomit. She held her like a baby. Took off her clothes. Bathed her and put a kaftan on her. Her mother kept on saying "I will be fine, Niraj. Do not worry."

"I am not going to listen to you. For once, you are going to listen to me. I am taking you to a specialist right now."

Niraj telephoned one of his Doctor friends who took an urgent appointment for his mother with a specialist.

The specialist did lots of questioning before advising for a multitude of tests, scans and X-rays. When the results came out the Doctor telephoned Niraj and told him that he wanted a private conversation with him.

"I am very sorry to tell you that your mother has been suffering from a gastric cancer for quite some time now. The cancer has unfortunately spread from her stomach to other parts of her body including her liver, lungs, bones, lining of the abdomen and lymph nodes. There is nothing that can be done apart from easing the pain."

Niraj was out of his mind. He cried like a small child in front of the Doctor.

The Doctor gave him some water, put his hand on his shoulder and said: "You will need lots of support. Soon she will be completely dependent. Do you have any family who can help? Your mother will need palliative care to help her reduce the physical, emotional, spiritual and the psycho-social distress. Unfortunately,

Cannabidiol is illegal in Mauritius and I cannot even import for my patients. But I will put her on morphine so that she does not suffer too much. The palliative care will help your mother to cope better and accept her illness and eventually her death. Be strong for your mother.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

Niraj knew he would not get any help from his father nor from any close relatives.

His mother did tell him how on their return from India, the gossips from the family had been unbearable. “Pran piti ki pa pou zot” (taking a child who is not theirs), now all their fortune will go to this child instead of close relatives who are their own blood”. Hearing all these badmouths made Anil and Sarita cut all ties with their families. Niraj did not have any family apart from his own dad who was now asking for a divorce.

As soon as they reached home after the medical visit, Niraj made his mum sit comfortably in the living room. He helped her to drink a few drops of water. He then telephoned the maid.

Together with the maid, Niraj did an audit of towels, bedsheets and nighties. He then made a list of what was needed which included bedpans, soft bedsheets and adult disposable diapers. He left his mother with the maid and went to get the most important necessities as well as the prescribed drugs. He then telephoned his dad to give him the bad news.

"I am very sorry, I have my job, a wife and my beautiful daughter to look after. I will not be able to come. Why don't you take a caregiver?"

Niraj had the maid during the day and at night he slept in his mother's room and attended to her. Before going to work he gave his mum her bath, helped her to take her medication and made sure that she had a light breakfast. He made her as comfortable as he possibly could until the arrival of the maid.

Sarita passed away three months after the visit to the Doctor.

Niraj was devastated. He sold the house with everything in it except for a few souvenirs that were close to his mum. He paid all the loans he had contracted to cope with his mother's medical expenses and rented a small flat.

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## CHAPTER 3

### ***CHARITY DINNER***

Niraj and Jane met at a charity dinner to raise fund for a shelter for young adults who were thrown out from children shelters and Youth Rehabilitation Centres once they turned 18. By pure coincidence they sat at the same table and discussed about the pains and traumatic experiences of these young girls who very often had to do the streets to feed themselves.

While having dinner, Jane expressed her feelings on these young adults. "It is unbelievable how young girls have to prostitute themselves to be able to survive. Some of them have no alternative than being used and abused by drug dealers. Once they start selling drugs, they become addicted themselves. They have to take more clients to buy their dose and give money to their pimps. Clients ask for skin to skin sexual intercourse with the result that they contract HIV virus. The stigmatisation is so tough that they prefer to remain quiet instead of going for treatments."

As they both believed in this cause, they helped the organisers to raise quite a lot of money by encouraging people to bid for the auction of gifts generously offered by companies.

The Charity Dinner brought luck to both Niraj and Jane. While bidding Niraj got a prize for a weekend for two in a five-star hotel and Jane got a beautiful gold pendant, offered by one of the finest jewellers of Mauritius.

Jane and Niraj connected so well that they did not want the relationship to end. They met quite a few times and shared their feelings. At the beginning Niraj was a bit embarrassed knowing Jane's background and her father being a national figure, a politician who had made quite a reputation for helping those on the margins of society. In fact, Jane's father, Krishna helped with the setting up and all administrative matters of the shelter for young adults. He saw many young girls on the streets not knowing where to go after they had been thrown out of shelters. Some of them did not know their parents while others were not even sure about their identity. They even doubted the names on their birth certificates. Quite a few of them had been told that their parents were alive. They searched for these parents but either they could not find them or the parents refused to have them. Most of them were classified "child beyond control" at the Youth Rehabilitation Centre. They did go to school when they were at the shelter and yet they could not even write their own names.

Prostitution and drugs became a way of life for these young adults.

Deep in his soul, Krishna could not remain quiet on this dark face of Mauritius. Tragedies that most people preferred to turn a blind eye on as they were too happy in their comfort zone to face this cruel reality.

Krishna worked with a Non-Governmental Organisation and encouraged the Manager to open a shelter for these destitute girls. He promised the Manager to help with administrative procedures as well as raising funds for the shelter. He pledged to look for sponsorship for the



residents and would set the example by sponsoring two girls. He started raising funds by organising charity dinners and other events.

In Parliament, Krishna did not miss the opportunity of raising his concerns of girls and boys living on the streets. Each time he got the same refusal and once the Minister of Women's Rights even said: "They must fend for themselves once they leave the shelters as they are 18. Honourable Roy, soon you will ask us to give them their bath and give their babies their bottles."

Opening a shelter became Krishna's personal mission. He organised awareness campaigns and marches together with members of the NGOs as well as the boys and the girls to raise awareness on this gloomy side of Mauritius. He helped NGOs caring for those on the margins of society with their advocacy work. He finally got a few Parliamentarians of the opposition party on his side. The Government found itself in a dire situation and finally agreed to earmark some funding for the shelter in the budget. But the condition was that the residents should stay in the shelter for only two years and be given training so that they could be economically independent.

Both Jane and her mother Audrey were firm believers in the work of Krishna. Jane helped her father with the shelter during weekends while Audrey did voluntary work for the shelter. She went there twice a week and did basic literacy classes in Creole and English so that the girls could at least write their names and a few sentences in Creole and English. She gave them techniques on how to dress and go for an interview. They learnt how to cook

and how to serve food. She looked for placement for them in snacks and hotels.

Jane invited Niraj to one of the charity dinner/dances that Krishna had organised in a restaurant. They sat at the same table and talked a lot.

After the dinner instead of going on the dance floor, Niraj held Jane's hand and walked her to the immense terrace that lead to a garden. They sat on a bench under a big banyan tree with brilliant lightings. Niraj started the conversation.

"I know your background, Jane. Not only your father has a national and an international reputation. I did some research on you. You have been travelling round the world. You went to a private school and your father paid for your studies at Sorbonne."

"Why are you telling me all this, Niraj?"

"I am falling in love with you and I believe you have the same sentiments for me."

"Yes, you are right. I still do not understand this kind of talk."

"The first time I travelled was from India to Mauritius. I was only two months old."

"How come you did not travel from Mauritius to India and back but only from India to Mauritius?"

"My parents adopted me from an orphanage in India. I was found near an ashram under a tree wrapped in a piece of cloth like a parcel. An old man found me and took me to the orphanage. He wanted to keep me but

due to his age and his economic situation he preferred not to have a child under his responsibility. I heard that at the orphanage that they looked after me really well and I was a healthy and lively baby. My parents chose me, adopted me officially and have always told me how special I was because I was a chosen one.”

Jane’s eyes welled. “You are so lucky to have fantastic parents. And you are so great Niraj. I admire you. You represented your school in quite a few events. I knew you even before I met you. The media has been talking a lot about your extra curricula achievements as Niraj, the winner. You brought so many trophies to your school.”

“Not so fantastic I am afraid. All went well until I was abroad for my studies. I got a scholarship for my University studies. In my second year, I did not hear much from my parents and my dad stopped writing completely. My mum who used to talk to me through Skype stopped the conversation. I wrote to my mum to know what was happening. She said everything was fine and that they were both very busy and hence could not write as often. But my gut feeling told me there was something wrong. I finished my degree and instead of staying one more year for my masters I returned home. My mum came on her own to get me at the airport. She did not say much apart from congratulating me and asking me about University life.”

“You should be happy that your mum came for you”, Jane said. “May be your dad was busy with his work.”

“Yes, he was busy, but not with his work.”

“What do you mean?”

"He was busy looking after his mistress and the baby that the mistress gave him."

"Oh! My God. I am so sorry to hear that Niraj."

"Worse, on the very day of my return, he told my mum that he wanted a divorce. He wanted to live with his mistress and his adorable daughter. My mother felt guilty thinking it was all her fault as she could not give my father a biological child."

"I am so sorry, Niraj. Hope your mum has got over it and is fine now."

"Yes, my mum must be fine now. I am sure she is looking after me wherever she is."

"You mean your mum left the house and you are now on your own."

"Yes, my mum left the house but on a funeral pyre. Only my friends, my maid and a few neighbours were present for the funeral. I was the only one at the cremation. My father never turned up. Instead of the normal Hindu rituals at the cremation, I recited a poem by the great poet Sarojini Naidu."

With tears in his eyes, Niraj recited the poem to Jane:

*Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,  
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;  
She skims like a Bird on the foam of a stream,  
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.  
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,  
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.*

*Softly, O softly we bear her along,  
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;  
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,  
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.  
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,  
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.*

"She will always be my pearl. I waited until the body turned to ash. I then took the ash and threw the urn in a nearby river."

With these words Niraj started to cry and in a sobbing voice added: "My mum fell ill after the divorce. I thought it was because she blamed herself and the pains were gnawing her. She would not let me take her to see a Doctor. When I put my foot down, it was too late. She survived only a few months after the medical visit. She had gastric cancer which spread inside her whole body."

Jane really felt for Niraj. "I admire you Niraj. You are really brave doing all this on your own."

"I want you to know that apart from my job and my flat, I do not have anything. I had to sell the house to pay for my mum's medical expenses."

Jane and Niraj were so engrossed in their discussion that they did not notice that Mr. Roy was watching them. Jane looked up and saw her dad walking towards them.

"Jane, what are you doing out there. I am waiting for you to do my speech. Remember you and your mother are supposed to be by my side. Come inside so that we can do the official part of the event," Krishna Roy told his daughter in a loving voice.

Father and daughter held each other by the waist followed by Niraj and walked into the hall.

During the next few days after the charity dinner, Jane tried to escape from her dad's eyes. She did not have breakfast with him as usual, pretending that she got up late.

One morning, Krishna caught his daughter at breakfast. He sat opposite her and looked at her straight in the eyes. "Jane, I am sure you have something to tell me and your mother."

Jane remained quiet. "You not want to talk? OK, I will not beat around the bush. I will go straight to the point. Are you in love with that boy you spent all your evening with at the Charity dinner?"

"Yes, I am."

"I have done some research on him. I know he is a hard worker although less qualified than you. He comes from a modest background. I do not have any problems with that but give me a few solid points why you think you will be happy with him."

"We have talked a lot."

"I have noticed that. This is not a good reason."

"I have seen how caring and loving he can be. He was devastated when his mother was terminally ill from cancer. He looked after his mother and even bathed her before going to work. Pains is killing him softly, dad. He has put in his head that all this happened because of him. Because he was adopted and his mother was punished

as she could not bear a child. He believes that his father had an extra marital relationship as he wanted to have a child of his own. In fact, his father has a daughter with his mistress and took the decision of leaving his family to stay with his new family. His father did not even come to the funeral when Niraj's mother passed away."

"I appreciate what you are telling me Jane. But do you think you are mother Theresa? Do you think you are the medication to heal Niraj's pains?"

"Yes, dad I am sure I can help him to get over all his pains and furthermore we are very much in love. I am sure he will be a good husband. If he has done so much for his mother. Why won't he be able to do the same for his own family?"

"OK, then. What are your plans?"

"I would like Niraj to meet you and mum officially and after that we can decide."

"OK, this is good planning. Find out with him when he can come home. We can have him either for lunch or dinner. I do not have to tell you that all your mother and I want is your happiness."

Everything went quite fast after the lunch with Niraj. Although Krishna Roy was a politician of great reputation, he agreed with Jane for a small ceremony in the yard of their house followed by cocktail/dinner.

As Niraj did not have any family, only his close colleagues were invited to the wedding. He invited his dad but he did not even reply. The uncle and auntie of Jane stood as

the father and the mother of Niraj. It was a memorable wedding with only close family of the Roy, close friends, political agents and a few politicians.

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## CHAPTER 4

### ***SEARCHING FOR JANE***

Krishna and Audrey were out of their mind. They could not sleep and waited for a call from Niraj. By 2.00 am when Niraj did not telephone, they went to see him thinking that Jane was back and Niraj did not bother to call.

They banged at the door. A disturbed Niraj opened the door. "I am very sorry I was on the point of telephoning you. Jane has not returned. I really do not know what to do. This is the first time something like this happens. With a lump in his throat, Niraj said "My two daughters, please come back, papa is waiting for you!"

"Instead of behaving like a drama queen, come in the car with me Niraj, let us go to "Roy for Joy" and see if Jane is there with the two girls. As you know she goes there from to time to spend time with the elderly. The girls like playing, drawing, dancing and doing gardening with the elders."

Roy for Joy was the first state of the art residential care home for the elderly.

It was run by Krishna's childhood friend, Rahul. The care home had a huge garden and the first ever swimming pool for Hydrotherapy for the elderly who had joint problems or who have had joint replacement surgery. The exercises done by experts had been tailored for each individual. They also had group sessions.

This low impact therapy had proved an excellent therapeutic for the elderly and both Krishna and Rahul were proud for having done marvel to the elderly.

It was the first of its kind in Mauritius. Krishna converted his grandparent's residence into this luxurious care home. There was quite a few mudslinging by the upper-class people. They blamed him for having chosen a village for this state-of-the-art residential place for the elderly.

Responding to criticism Krishna said "Villagers have the same right as people in town. This is the first time they are having such a dream environment to finish their old age. If you want to start a place like that in town, I will be prepared to advise you and even get qualified staff for you."

Roy for Joy had a great reputation in the Indian Ocean region as it was the first of its kind. The Centre had done miracles with some of the elderly with the exercises in the warm swimming pool. The exercises had proved to enhance the endurance and overall physical fitness of the elders. Few of them who could not walk started to walk after a few months at Roy for Joy.

Jane, Jinny and Jenny enjoyed going to Roy for Joy to play with the elderly. Sometimes they spent the whole day there.

Rahul got a shock when he saw Krishna "What are you doing here Krishna? So early in the morning. Did you get a complaint from one of the residents?"

"No! Nothing of that sort. The residents will always be grateful for the quality of life they are getting at Roy for Joy. You have made this place like a five-star hotel. No! Unfortunately, it is worse than that. Jane left the house with my two granddaughters and is nowhere to be found. We know how the three of them like coming here to play with the elders. Jenny and Jinny keep on saying that they have not only Audrey as their "nani" (grandmother) but they have 40 grandmothers. We thought of coming here before going to the police."

"Oh! My goodness. This is terrible. Do you want me to come with you Krishna? I can ask my assistant to replace me."

"No! there is no point. Audrey and Niraj are with me. I trust the police. I am sure the police will do their best."

"This makes me think of my little Angel. Hope nothing has happened to them and you will find them safe and sound."

The three of them went to the police station. As soon as the police officer saw Mr. Roy, he stood up and saluted.

"What can I do for you, Sir, at this early time of the day?"

"My daughter left the house on Saturday or Sunday morning and has not been back yet."

"Sir, you know how these young people are nowadays. Maybe she went out with friends then to a party. For these young people 2.30 a.m. is still quite early to come back home."

Krishna's face went red with anger. "Shut up! What do you know about young people? Is it because you wear a uniform that you think you know everything!"

Krishna took out the picture of Jenny and Jinny hugging their mother Jane and showed it to the police officer.

"Do you think my daughter went to a rave party with two small children?"

The police officer started to stammer and said: "Sorry, Sir. All my apologies. Let me telephone my immediate boss"

"It is not your immediate boss that you are going to telephone but the Commissioner of Police. Tell him that Krishna Roy needs him at the station urgently. I have never asked for any favour. This this is an urgent matter where the lives of a mother and her two small children are at stake."

It did not take long for the Commissioner of Police to arrive at the station. "OK, do not worry, Sir. My officer told me what happened on the telephone. We will do everything that we can to get hold of your daughter and your two grandchildren. Please leave the picture with me. Go home, have some rest and leave everything in our qualified hands. As soon as we have some news, I will give you a call."

"I have seen so many things in my career. Young girls being abducted to go into prostitution. Children being sold and sent overseas to do child labour. Oh! My God. I really hope that nothing has happened to them. Let us go to the temple and pray before going home, Audrey."

"Going to the temple at this time of the day. It is only 6.00a.m. The temple might not even be open."

"The Pundit lives at the back of the temple. Let us go there and knock at his door. I know he will not refuse to make a little puja so that we can find them."

On their way home after the Puja, Krishna got a call from the Commissioner of Police.

"I am sure the puja has been fulfilled Audrey."

At the other end of the line the Commissioner of Police said: "We have good news for you, Sir. A full team of our investigation team with helicopters as well as the Police Emergency Intervention Unit found your daughter in a remote place near a stream. I am sending you the location by WhatsApp. Can you please come immediately to talk to her? She might need psychological support."

Krishna telephoned Niraj telling him that they were on their way to get him so that they could go together to get Jane.

Audrey started to cry and told her husband. "God has listened to us Krishna. They have found Jane. Let us now pray so that they find Jinny and Jenny."

On reaching the place, they found a girl sitting down on muddy ground, her head between her legs. Her clothes were torn. Her hair full of mud. She had bruises on her arms. Krishna rushed towards her. "Oh my God what have they done to you Jane. Where are the girls? I will help you to get up. Come with me darling. We will try to find the girls. They should not be far."

The girl turned her face to look at Krishna.

Krishna looked at her with an intense feeling of shock and horror. It was not Jane but a girl with long hair and same physique as Jane. She looked very much like Jane from the back.

With trembling hands Krishna helped the girl to get on her feet. She could hardly talk but finally in a suffocated voice explained how she was raped by four men. "I cried on top of my voice but nobody heard me. They threatened me with a butcher's knife which they put under my throat. I thought they would kill me. Three of them held my hands and opened my legs while one was raping me and they did it in turn. After their crime, they pulled up their trousers and left me on the ground."

A female police officer who formed part of the investigation team talked to her and took her in the police van. "Do not worry we will take you to the police station so that you can file a complaint. Have you ever seen these boys before?"

"Yes, one of them is my neighbour. Once he told me that I was beautiful and he wanted to have an affair with me. He even told me that if I accept, he will give me a large amount of money and I will not have to work."

"What were you doing in this remote place so early in the morning?" the police officer asked.

"I work at several places to be able to feed my three young children and pay for the rent. I have been doing this for quite some time and I take the same road all the

time as it is the quickest. I have never had any problems before," the girl replied.

According to the police the boys had been watching her for a few days before doing their criminal action.

"Do not worry my girl! Since one of them is your neighbour, it will be easy to get them all. Have you by any chance seen a mother with two small girls in the surroundings?", the police officer questioned.

Krishna knew the answer would be in the negative as Jane's car was not in the surroundings. "No! She cannot be here. Jane is a very careful girl. She will never walk in a place like that with her two daughters."

Mr. Roy followed the police van to the station.

"Krishna, why are you going to the police station? Let us go back home and see if we can put a private detective on the matter," Audrey told her husband.

"No Audrey! Let us leave the matter in the hands of the police. Jane, Jinny and Jenny cannot have disappeared like that. There is more to that. I promise you, myself and Niraj, to find them. Now, let us go to the station to help this poor girl. I will suggest to her that after all the formalities with the police, she goes to the shelter with her kids. I will pay for her expenses at the shelter and will make arrangements for her children to go to a school nearby. Once she is settled in her new environment, I will try to get her a decent job."

"Krishna, I will never understand you. We do not know what has happened to our family and you are thinking how to help others?"

With tears in his eyes and without even thinking, Krishna looked at Audrey straight in the eyes and said:

*"In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.*

*Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me.*

*For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore, for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.*

*Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.*

*Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.*

*But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God.*

*My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me."*

Audrey hugged Krishna tight and said "Oh my love I did know that you read the Bible. This is part of Psalm 31 of King James Version that I have on my Kindle."

"Yes, I could not sleep while waiting for Niraj's call. I took your Kindle without your permission. I opened it. It was on the page of this part of the King James Version of the Bible. How do you explain this Audrey? I do not know if this is a coincidence. I have a feeling that we will soon find our family. Let us go home how."

As soon as they reached home, Audrey made some coffee and encouraged Krishna to eat some breakfast.



"I cannot stop thinking of this poor girl, Audrey. She has been put on our way so that we can help her. She badly needs all the support that we can give her. She has known multiple rape and has three small children. Although the police will find the criminals as one of them is her neighbour, she might never be able to get over the trauma. It will be difficult for her to reconstruct her life. To tell you the truth I am happy that it was not our Jane near this stream. I am confident that we will find our..."

Krishna did not finish his phrase when his mobile rang. He saw the number of the Commissioner of Police and put the telephone on loud speaker so that Audrey could hear the conversation.

"Mr Roy, the pilot of our helicopter found a car which we have every reason to believe is that of your daughter. The car is in the parking of the airport. The helicopter landed on the tarmac and our Special Intervention Unit is near the car now. Let us meet there so that you can identify the car. We can then decide on how to proceed."

The brand-new Red Peugeot 3008 with all the latest gadgets and a personal licence plate number JR07 was given to Jane by her dad for her 35<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Both Audrey and Krishna were relieved and said with one voice "our prayers have been heard. Let us call Niraj and go to the airport."

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## CHAPTER 5

### ***CHILDHOOD FRIENDS***

Krishna Roy came from a rich family who were in business in Mauritius. They had upmarket shops in all the big shopping malls selling exclusive clothes as well as gourmet shops selling the best wine, cheese, pasta, meat, salmon, oysters and bio vegetables. All their products were imported by plane. They had an exclusive clientele who could afford these luxury items.

One day Sanjeev Roy and his wife Shakti decided to sell everything as well as their mansions, limousines and businesses to go and settle in England with their small son, Krishna, who was five years old. They chose Manchester as they had very good friends there. Their way of living changed overnight. From three maids, two gardeners, two drivers and a watchman helping to run their mansions and driving their limousines, they had only one person once a week to clean the house and do the ironing. The over 50 employees working in the different shops were paid their full compensation and over and above Sanjeev found jobs for most of them with the new management who bought the different businesses.

The Roys were happy living with their son in the big house that they bought in the outskirts of Manchester. A house with a front and a back garden as they thought they would have more than one child. They even had plans that when Krishna became an adult, he would stay with them with his wife and family. However hard Shakti and Sanjeev tried, the long-awaited baby girl never

came. They did state of the art treatments including assisted reproductive technology but in vain.

Krishna did all his primary, secondary and University education in Manchester. He was a brilliant student and his parents had plans for him to go into business. One thing that the parents kept on telling Krishna which became like a mantra to him "Never forget your roots nor the language of the country you were born." They spoke nothing but Creole at home.

The Roys went to see Krishna's grandparents at least once a year during Christmas time being given that it was too cold in England and with Krishna being on his long holiday. Krishna enjoyed talking to his grandparents in Creole and even learnt a few words of Bhojpuri. The grandparents were born and lived in Morcellement St. Andre, a village in the North of Mauritius. They all stayed together except for one or two weeks in a bungalow at the beach.

The grand parents had the biggest house in the village. Krishna had difficulty to understand how other people lived in thatched roof houses while his grandparents lived in a two-storey house with a large veranda in front of the house and another big one at the back of the house with off white marble floor tiles. The back garden was so big that they had to employ two gardeners. They grew a large variety of vegetables and fruits for their own consumption and gave any surplus to the neighbours. There were always beautiful and colourful seasoned flowers in the front garden.

Krishna's parents were called Roy from England by the villagers.

Year in, year out, when Sanjeev and his family reached the village in a rented car, the excitement of Krishna was at its peak seeing the village children running barefoot after the car. Their eyes and mouths opened so wide that Krishna could not recognise their faces.

Once the car stopped in front of the grandparents' house and Sanjeev opened the boot, all the children were like little bees humming over the contents in the boot. They all rushed and poked their little heads into the boot. Krishna always remembered how when one of them poked his head so deep into the boot he could not get out. Sanjeev had to pull him out gently by his two legs. Since that day his nick name became "Leg".

The first thing that Sanjeev did was to take out the big packets of sweets and biscuits that he bought for the children at the duty-free shop in Mauritius. They all had their share and once the children were happy with their gifts they ran away. Sanjeev with the help of his wife, Shakti, then took their time to take out the suitcases and the hand luggage from the car.

Meanwhile the grandparents were waiting on the doorsteps to bless them with a little puja (worship) with a brass plate in their hands containing of a ritual offering of flowers, camphor and mithai. The sacred ash from the camphor was then put in the form of a dot on the forehead of Sanjeev, Shakti and Krishna. They all bent on the feet of the elders who put their hands on their heads to bless them before they entered the house.

A male servant took their luggage to the first floor where they had a flat all to themselves. The main bedroom with attached toilet and bathroom was for the parents and the small bedroom was for Krishna. They had their own veranda which faced the mountains. They took their morning tea and breakfast in the veranda so as not to disturb the old grandparents who had their own rituals.

The first thing that the grandparents did in the morning was to get some fresh flowers from the garden, took a brass recipient of water and went to their puja (prayer) room. The puja room formed an intrinsic part of the Roy's house. A lit lamp remained in this room 24 over 24. The room was used for morning prayers as well as prayers on important occasions, like birthdays, wedding anniversaries and Indian festivals. On important events, members of the family as well as neighbours met in this room for a bigger puja. For the Roy this was how their house got all the positive energy and especially with the burning of incense. Sometimes a Pundit (Hindu Priest) was called to perform specific prayers and rituals. A vegetarian meal always followed the big puja. All the guests sat on long benches in front long tables put for the occasion in the back veranda of the house. They all ate with their fingers on banana leaves.

After a couple of years Krishna became the best friend of the neighbour's son, Rahul. They were like twins being given they were the same age and height. Krishna talked about Rahul nonstop with his parents and grandparents. They laughed when they listened to the mischiefs that the two boys did together and sometimes brought Krishna to task.

Krishna's grandparents were uncomfortable when Krishna went to Rahul to have breakfast and spent the day with his family. But Sanjeev and Shakti did not object and kindly told the elders, "let the boy enjoy his holidays. It is good that he mixes with people of different ethnic and social background. Rahul seems to be his best friend anyway."

The bondage between Krishna and Rahul was special. They loved and supported each other. Krishna often said to his parents "Rahul is like a gift that has been given to me. He is the brother that I have always longed for although we are from different background and live miles apart. I know I can always rely on Rahul. He means a lot to me. There is some kind of chemistry between us."

"Yes, indeed, my son, you must nurture this relationship, you must water its seed and it will keep on growing." Shakti told Krishna.

It became a tradition for Krishna to visit his friend the next day after their arrival in the village.

Once at Rahul's place, Krishna took off his flip flop at the kitchen door and walked barefoot. The flooring of the kitchen was made with cow dung. Krishna sat near Rahul's mum who was busy preparing breakfast which consisted of a recipient of tea. Water, loose tea, a few pods of cardamom, sugar and fresh cow's milk were all boiled together. The tea was served with a few chapatis brushed with some homemade ghee and sprinkled with sugar.

Rahul's mother squatted in front of a firewood stove to prepare the breakfast. She wiped her tears from time to

time as smoke was getting into her eyes. She used a "poukni", a tube to blow on the embers to prevent too much smoke.

The two boys sat on small low benches to have their breakfast.

Krishna was overwhelmed to eat this "nasta" (breakfast).

"Oh, this is so good chachi (aunt). I must ask my mum to come and learn how to prepare such beautiful nasta."

"Krishna, this is poor people's breakfast. I am sure you eat much better food at your place and your mum will not be interested to prepare this kind of food."

"My mum is very adventurous and cooks a great variety of food. Very often she goes on YouTube to look for recipes."

"What do you mean? She looks in a poukni?"

They all laughed before Rahul explained to his mum what YouTube meant.

After breakfast the two boys went to pick vegetables, chillies and herbs for the preparation of lunch. If there were not enough vegetables in the garden, the boys, on the advice of Rahul's mother, went to ask the neighbour. It was a normal thing in the village where sharing and helping each other was a way of life.

After helping Rahul in the vegetable garden, the two boys held each other by the shoulders and walked on the rocky and muddy streets to meet other boys. They played football on a pitch full of gravels and muddy at times. Krishna, very often, hurt himself running barefoot



like the other boys. Rahul and Krishna were always in the winning team. They came back home with their trophy which was a small ball given to them by the referee. With a marker, Rahul proudly put the date and the year on the ball. Rahul's mother found a strategic place on the mantelpiece of the living room to place the prize. It was a one-bedroom house. Rahul slept on a small bed in the living room which also served as a place for him to do his homework.

On reaching home after winning the match, both Rahul and Krishna rushed to the kitchen and said: "We are starving. Can we have our lunch now?"

"I am very sorry boys, you will not have any lunch if you do not go and wash yourself, clean your feet and pour some fresh water on your dirty heads." Rahul's mother affectionately said.

There was no running water at Rahul's place. When they needed water, they used a can to take water from a large drum placed outside the kitchen.

Going to the toilet was quite an issue for Krishna. It was not a problem for him to pee near the vegetable garden but when he had to poop, he really did not know what to do. At the beginning Rahul gave him a can of water and asked him to go in the sugar cane field. But after a few times in the sugar cane field, he wanted to do like Rahul. He tried the latrine which was a deep pit in the earth. The latrine was surrounded by four walls made of straw with a small door attached by a latch. The latch was only a small piece of wood placed on a hook. The door could not be locked properly. At the beginning Krishna was

afraid looking at this dark pit and thinking what would happen to him if he fell into this pit. Each time he made a little prayer while squatting to do his poop and washed himself with his can of water. He forced himself to get used to it so that he could do like Rahul and be congratulated by him. The bathroom looked the same as the latrine except that the flooring was made of gravels. Rahul explained to Krishna how at night he had to carry an oil lamp to go to the toilet. "I am so afraid that my mother has to accompany me."

The only place that had electricity in the house was the living room. This was a big luxury for the family and in the evening after dinner the family sat there. Rahul's dad read from the Coran or from a few old books while Rahul's mum did her knitting, embroidery or crochet. They kept very quiet so as not to disturb Rahul with his homework.

There was also a little shelf in the corner of the living room with a few pictures of Hindu deities, an oil lamp, a few sandals and a camphor holder. Just like Krishna's grandparents, Rahul's mum did her prayer every morning.

Next to the shelf with the divinities a round plate hung on the wall on which was written in Arabic "Allahu Akbar".

Being a Muslim did not prevent Amit to attend pujas at the Roys. In fact, he enjoyed it and he knew all the prayers and sang with the other devotees. He enjoyed eating with his fingers on a banana leaf. He often said that food tasted better on banana leaves. He very often

joked:” The food tastes good because I am the one who cut and wash all these banana leaves.”

Once both boys were cleaned, they were allowed into the kitchen to eat the delicious vegetable curry with parathas (Indian bread). Krishna congratulated Rahul’s mother for the delicious food and said that it was the best parathas that he had eaten. They ate with their fingers in aluminium plates and poured water from a pitcher into metal cups to drink.

Rahul parents did not touch the metal cups with their lips. They tipped back the cups little by little, threw back their heads, lifted the metal cups so that it hovered near their mouths and proceeded by pouring the water into their mouths. Krishna tried to imitate Rahul’s parents but instead he spilled water on his clothes and in his food. They all laughed but Krishna did not give up until he succeeded.

The water for drinking was nice and cool. Amit went to collect the water from a nearby spring very early every morning and kept it in a clay jar while the water for cleaning and washing was collected from the river nearby and kept in the drum.

Krishna rarely saw Rahul’s dad as he left before dawn to work in the sugar cane fields which belonged to the grandparents of Krishna. Santi woke up before her husband to prepare a little basket of food. She weaved her own baskets from vacoas leaves. The lunch consisted of chapatis wrapped in banana leaves; one curry and some pickles all placed in a katora (bowl) as well as a bottle of tea made with plenty of sugar, milk and

cardamom pods. Once her husband was off on his bicycle, Santi went to get grass to feed the two cows and milked them. During school days Rahul delivered milk to the neighbours before going to school but when Krishna was on holiday in Mauritius, Santi did the selling of milk herself as she wanted her son to have a good time with his best friend.

Amit Hosanee considered himself lucky to be working for the Roy family. Every three months he got a bonus and a sack of rice. With his bonus, Amit Hosanee and his family walked to the nearest Chinese shop to buy provisions for three months. The provisions included flour, oil, pulses, dried spices and biscuits among other things. They bought biscuits mainly for Rahul. They loaded a donkey cart with their goods to return home. Rahul really enjoyed sitting near the man driving the donkey cart. On the way back home, Santi often asked the driver to stop so that she could buy a few things which included steel plates, mugs and clothes from street vendors.

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## CHAPTER 6

### ***CHRISTMAS WITH RAHUL***

Once Krishna asked for permission to spend Christmas with his best friend. The grandparents were dead against this idea. When Sanjeev and Shakti explained how this was important for Krishna, they reluctantly gave up. They all helped to buy and to wrap Christmas gifts to offer to the family on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

The Hosanee could not believe their eyes when they unwrapped their gifts on the dot of midnight. A white long kurta with a pair of pantaloons for Amit to attend his Friday prayers; a long skirt with its blouse and a long scarf for Santi to wear when she went to do puja in temples or to go to puja at the Roy and the biggest parcel was for Rahul. He got lots of materials for schools, story books, Lego and a fire extinguisher lorry.

The gifts were bought on the advice of Krishna as he knew the Hosanees very well. Krishna also got a parcel for himself and was advised to unwrap it when the Hosanees unwrapped theirs. Krishna got the same gift as Rahul except for the school books.

Krishna and Rahul had the luxury of sleeping in the only bedroom of the house instead of Rahul's small bed. Santi slept on Rahul's bed in the living room and Amit slept on a mattress on the floor near to Santi.

The parents could hear them talking all night and making plans how Krishna would come back to live in Morcellement St. Andre after his studies.

"I want to be close to you Rahul," was the last word Krishna said before they both fell asleep hand in hand. Amit had to wake them up in the morning.

Christmas day fell on a Friday. Amit asked his son to accompany him to the mosque.

"Krishna will stay with your mother until we come back", Amit told his son.

"Can't Krishna come with us, dad?"

"I am not sure his parents and grandparents will appreciate that."

"Then why do we go to attend puja at their place? Why do we all go to the temple when mum does offerings to the divinity when I am sick?"

"I believe, you have a point son. Krishna, would you like to come with us to the Mosque? Or should I ask your dad first?"

"Of course, uncle Amit. I know my dad will not mind. I have never been to a mosque before."

When they returned home from the mosque, Santi asked them to change their clothes. "I have a job waiting for you. Please go in the garden and see if you can catch a chicken. If you can't. It will be bad as there will be no lunch for you."

They both rushed to the garden and ran after the biggest rooster that they could see. After a few rounds in the garden and in the yard, they finally got their catch.

Krishna watched Santi putting the bird in boiling water after Amit had cut off its head. When Santi took the bird from the water and started to pluck it, Krishna said "Auntie, I always thought that chicken came straight from the supermarket. This is the first time I see somebody plucking a chicken."

They all laughed and watched Santi roast the spices to make the curry paste on the "roche cari", a thick and flat rectangular mortar which rested on a stand made of bricks placed outside the kitchen. Santi crushed the spices on the mortar which had fine horizontal grooves that enabled a good grip for the paste. She used a small cylindrical roller cut from stone to pound and to crush the various spices together adding a little bit of water all along until all the spices were all bound. The flavour of the aromatic paste reached the nose of Krishna with delight and he said: "We do eat curry at home but we buy the curry powder from the supermarket."

"Wait, my son until you eat this chicken curry with your fingers. But meanwhile help Rahul to shell the peas," Amit said.

"What? Shelling peas. I always thought that peas came from a tin!"

They all had a big laugh and Amit said: "Now, now, my boy, we have to do your culinary education on Mauritian food. I have just been to the neighbour's garden and got these fresh peas but they have to be shelled before we put them in the curry."

Santi added: "We will eat all that with a good tomato chutney with lots of coriander leaves. I will not put any chili in case you find it too hot Krishna."

As a special treat they all had their chicken curry, parathas, cucumber salad and chutney in Arcoroc plates instead of the tin plates. They ate in the living room sitting on Rahul's bed and on Rahul's chair. They all ate with their fingers as Santi said that food tasted better eating with fingers.

Desert was homemade 'Fenousse' that Santi prepared in the early morning with fresh milk from her cow, vinegar and lots of sugar. It was so nice that they all had two helpings.

"Now boys, I suggest you have some rest after this heavy meal," Amit said knowing too well that the boys had other plans in their little heads.

They both laughed and said with one voice: "Yes, we are going to rest. We are taking a mat and going to relax under a tree on the river banks."

Amit told them to be careful. "OK, boys! Make sure not to slip in the river. You can take your story books, drawing books and pencils but not the Legos and the other toys. When you come back, if we are still resting, wake us up so that we can have tea together before Krishna leaves."

They took a big handmade mat beautifully weaved by Santi. Once on the river banks, they looked for the biggest tree to spread the mat under its shade. The intertwined roots formed like a mat given by nature. "We



now have two mats, one given by nature and one made by auntie Santi.”

They watched women fishing shrimps using their muslin scarves. The place was so quiet that they could hear the sound of the wind passing through the branches and the leaves. The sound of leaves and the melodic voices of the birds formed the most magnificent philharmonic orchestra.

“The birds and the leaves are very talkative. They seem to be having an animated conversation. I wonder what all this discussion is about?” Krishna said.

“Let us write down their gossips, Krishna. What do you think? I will be the branches and the leaves and you will be the birds. We can make a little book on this interactive communication between the birds and the leaves. It will be our Christmas gift to each other. The best Christmas souvenir that we will always treasure.”

“What a good idea? It will be like our talisman. When we want to see each other, we can invoke the magical powers of our talisman, we just have to close our eyes, put our hands on the book and the energy of this book will allow us to talk to each other,” Krishna replied.

They agreed that Krishna would write the conversation of the birds while Rahul would write that of the leaves.

**Birds:** *"Why are there so few of us now? We used to have many families, relatives and friends on these branches. We lived like an extended family with parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews. We had such a beautiful community life. We were always*

*chatting, telling stories and singing beautiful melodies. We looked for food for the whole community. Nobody touched the eggs in our nests. We all cared for the babies and put food in their fragile beaks very gently. We never said 'this is not my baby and I am not going to feed it'. All babies were ours. Now we do not know where our babies are and we are still searching for our families."*

**Leaves:** *Look at these young boys below. Can you see what are they doing? They are pulling down the nests with their sling stones while their friends are killing some of you with their bows and arrows.*

**Birds:** *We cannot defend ourselves. We are so small. We are traumatised not knowing what to do and what will happen next. They are killing us for fun and will not even be able to eat us. This is appalling. Some us have lost our wings with their atrocious games and will never be able to fly again. The juice of the leaves that our parents are using to heal the injuries are helping but the wings are gone for good and will not grow.*

**Leaves:** *How will these boys feel if the same thing was done to them. If they quarrel among themselves and get badly hurt? Or using, sling stones and bows and arrows to fight?*

**Birds:** *Parents nowadays encourage boys to brawl saying that they must become strong men. When the boys are hurt their parents take them to the hospitals but we do not have hospitals. We are our own doctors and nurses and has to use what nature offers us to get well.*

**Leaves:** *Birds, the problem is not only with you and your family. We will soon have the same fate.*

**Birds:** *How? Why are you saying this my dear friends? Your branches and your leaves are so magnificent. The fruits and the flowers that you produce bring sweet fragrance to the environment. This little breeze right now is spreading your perfume all over the place. Look there are two boys sitting under you branches and eating what you produce.*

**Leaves:** *Open your eyes and look at the other side of the river. Look properly and tell me what is happening.*

**Birds:** *Oh my God! I cannot believe it. They are chopping down the trees. Trees that have been here hundreds of years. Trees that are cleaning the air that they breathe. They are criminals.*

**Leaves:** *They do not realise that they are killing themselves softly and slowly by chopping us down. Their future is at stake.*

**Birds:** *How?*

**Leaves:** *We are the ones who give them fruits like mangoes, chalta (elephant apple), cythere fruit (june plum) and many others. We also give them their staple diet with our breadfruit. Furthermore, they need our shades to protect themselves. Look at the other side of the river, families are having their picnics and resting under our shades.*

**Birds:** *All these wild and juicy fruits will soon disappear. We need your branches and your flowers for our survival. You are the source of our livelihood. Not only us but the*

*bees as well. These people do not realise that they soon will not have any honey if they keep on with their criminal actions.*

**Leaves:** *Look at all these beautiful and colourful butterflies of different sizes and colours that do not exist anywhere else. Nature has done such a beautiful job that even the best artist cannot reproduce these fantastic shapes and colours. Butterflies will soon be something of the past in our country. Hope they start flying to other shores right now before they too are sentenced to death.*

**Birds:** *Fortunately, they have a map in their heads and know where to fly to. As for us birds and trees, I believe we are doomed. These little boys and girls who are destroying us do not realise that their children will know our beauty only from books. Human beings are thinking of how to make quick money and are destroying mother nature on the back of the future generations. Destroying the foetus that are inside mother earth before it has the chance to give birth to the plants that feed them.*

**Leaves:** *Trees that keep them alive with their fruits, vegetables and above all the air that they breath. The boys are killing you and the adults are killing all of us including themselves. Have you heard that in some places they are putting fire to forests to make room for big concrete buildings?*

**Birds:** *Yes, my friends. I know. Why do you think I am on your branches right here on the banks of the river?*

**Leaves:** *Yes, I can guess. You had to find other places of refuge. The beautiful trees that were home to you have been chopped to make room for infrastructure that*

*will benefit the rich. In your case you can fly to other regions but in our case, we are as dead as the dodo.*

***Birds:*** *You are right. But how do we leave those who have broken wings behind. We must care for them. Their mothers are already heartbroken.*

*The leaves, the branches and all the birds sang a powerful ballad, a sad song at full volume to express their pains and sufferings.*

Rahul suggested that they finish the story with the beautiful song of Louis Armstrong "What a Wonderful World".

"I am sure Louis Armstrong is turning in his grave hearing our story on the leaves and the birds, Rahul. With the monstrosity that people are doing to mother earth, "What a wonderful world" will soon become "What a pitiful-abysmal world."

They both agreed to finish the book with Louis Armstrong.

*I see trees of green  
Red roses too  
I see them bloom  
For me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*I see skies of blue  
And clouds of white  
The bright blessed day  
The dark sacred night*

*And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*The colors of the rainbow  
So pretty in the sky  
Are also on the faces  
Of people going by  
I see friends shaking hands  
Saying, "How do you do?"  
They're really saying  
"I love you"*

*I hear babies cry  
I watch them grow  
They'll learn much more  
Than I'll never know  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

*Yes, I think to myself  
What a wonderful world*

Rahul and Krishna made some drawings to illustrate the conversation between the birds and the leaves. "This will make our book more captivating. A calligraphy "*The Leaves and the Birds by Rahul and Krishna*" as the title will be great. We can put it on a background of a big tree with birds and butterflies flying around." The two friends discussed and agreed.

Rahul and Krishna started making some attractive and colourful illustrations of their surroundings on the river banks which included birds, butterflies, trees, women

fishing for the tiny river shrimps, boys shooting at the birds and men chopping down trees. Each page had the most stunning drawing of mother nature.

"We have worked hard and have come up with a beautiful piece of art. I suggest we leave our things here and go to pick some wild fruits. I am sure Auntie Santi will love cooking the fruits with plenty of sugar. You can have this with your parathas for breakfast before going to school, Rahul."

They started to pick juicy and colourful wild fruits that they could lay hands on. "Oh! My God how are we going to carry that now? We do not even have one of these rattan baskets that you mum makes."

"Eh, do you find this a problem!" Krishna said before removing his t-shirt, made it in the form of a sack and asked Rahul to put the fruits in his t-shirt.

They saw a little boy barefoot, wearing a t-shirt full of holes. He was fishing with a line made of bamboo and a piece of bread attached with a piece of string at the end. He put all his fish in a rusted tin container full of water then he threw back the fish in the river.

The boy heard the conversation between Krishna and Rahul and turned towards them and said: "I can help you picking fruits. You do not even have to put in your t-shirt, I will give you my tin container. I even have a basket which is on the river banks."

"Are you sure?" Rahul asked.

"Yes. Why do you fish if you then throw all the fish back in the water?" Krishna queried.

"They are babies and have to go back to their mothers," was the reply of the boy.

The three boys picked fruits together. They had such a large amount that the tin container was not enough and the boy had to get his basket.

Amit and his wife were waiting for the boys near the kitchen door. "Tea is ready boys. Let us have some tea then I will drop Krishna back to his grandparents." Amit said before noticing that both Krishna and Rahul had no t-shirts on. They were both carrying an old basket full of holes made with plant fibres as well as a rusted tin container.

"Where are your t-shirts young boys?"

"I have put mine in the bottom of the basket so that we do not lose our fruits, uncle Amit."

"Oh Allah! What am I going to tell your mother Krishna?"

Santi took the basket and the tin container from the hand of boys, emptied them and went to the wash-rock and washed Krishna's t-shirt putting some bicarbonate of soda and vinegar in the water. "I really cannot believe it. A beautiful t-shirt like that. Let me see if I can save it. For now, go and change yourself into this nice pair of shorts and the shirt that you had last night. Once the t-shirt is dried, I will ask Rahul to bring it to you."

With a firm voice Amit asked his son where his t-shirt was. "This t-shirt was a Christmas gift from your mother and I. You will be in great trouble young man. You better go back to the river banks and start searching for your t-shirt. It is a new t-shirt that you wore for the first time."



Krishna started to stammer and finally said: "We saw a boy at the bank of the river. He was trying to catch some small fish while his mum was fishing for river shrimps using her muslin scarf. His pair of shorts and his t-shirt were full of holes and water was dripping from them. He was barefoot. When he saw us picking wild fruits, he offered to help us. He even offered his basket. Rahul took his t-shirt off and gave it to the boy while I took off mine off to put at the bottom of the basket."

Amit did not know what to say and looked at the boys hard in the eyes. They both bent their heads, then Rahul said: "But dad, you keep on saying that zakat is important."

Amit was dazzled and did not know what to say. "Yes, you are right son. You gave the boy a beautiful Christmas gift that I am sure he will always remember. Who knows? May be one day he will tell the story of the boys he met at the river banks to his children and grandchildren."

This was the best and most memorable Christmas that Krishna and Rahul have ever had.

When it was time for the Roy from England to leave, Rahul came to see his friend. Krishna hugged him and said "I promise that we will always be friend. I will ask my dad to make two copies of "*The Leaves and the Birds*" and I will post yours. This will be our talisman which will make our friendship grow stronger and stronger."

Rahul slit his thumb with a little knife and asked Krishna to do the same. They rubbed their blood together and said "We are brothers for life."

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## CHAPTER 7

### ***LIFE IN MANCHESTER***

Krishna kept his promise and wrote to Rahul regularly even when work at the office became hectic. The exchange of letters made both Krishna and Rahul feel close although they met physically only once a year.

With his Masters from the London School of Economics and his specialisation in Corporate Law, Krishna got a very good job in a private company. He did so well that after three years he was promoted to a managerial position in one of the Departments in Manchester. He could not ask for more as he wanted to be close to his parents. Krishna had a few people working under him including Audrey, his Personal Secretary.

Audrey was more than a Secretary. She was the Secretary to all Board Meetings; took notes of meeting and actions on all resolutions. In other words, she was the right hand of Krishna. After a few years working together what should not have happened, happened. Krishna and Audrey, fell madly in love. On the advice of Krishna, Audrey reluctantly resigned from her job. "Do not worry darling, I will find something for you in another Department or in another company. From an ethical point of view, you should not be working for me. I know you are a hard worker. All the staff here likes you and have nothing but praise for your professionalism," Krishna told Audrey.

"I want to remain in the same City as you Krishna."

“I have plans. Let me discuss with my parents first and then we can all brainstorm together.”

Rahul, on the other hand, got a job as a teacher in a State Secondary School. He had good results for his Higher School Certificate. His parents were proud of him but they could not afford to send him overseas for further studies. Instead, he went to the University of Mauritius for a degree in English and did his teachers’ training at the Mauritius Institute of Education.

The work of Krishna was so demanding that he stopped going to see his grandparents yearly.

News from Rahul became scarce and stopped completely. Krishna kept on writing regularly but his letters remained unanswered. He even sent letters to Amit, Rahul’s dad to enquire about his friend. No reply.

Krishna felt guilty when news arrived that his granddad had passed away. The whole family took the first plane to Mauritius to organise the funeral. After all the different rituals and prayers, Sanjeev persuaded his mother to accompany him to Manchester.

“You will feel at home with us mum. Furthermore, you will be surrounded by Krishna and his girlfriend, Audrey. Who knows maybe you will have the chance to see your grandchildren? I will ask Amit and his wife to look after the house until everything is settled.”

The old lady did not reply but hugged her son and cried.

In a sobbing voice she said “Amit stopped working for us. You must have noticed that they did not come to the

funeral. We have done nothing wrong. On the contrary we have always treated them as our family.”

Before taking the plane and although Krishna had urgent work to do at the office, he yearned to see Rahul. It was important for him to know why Rahul and his family did not attend the funeral.

He rushed to Rahul's house and was faced with a locked door. He headed to the kitchen and saw a latch attached with a piece of wire on the door. He enquired with the neighbours. They all gave him the same reply “We do not know where they are. One day they left the village before dawn without telling anybody of their destination,” one of the neighbours said.

On his way home, Krishna met a little boy running after an old bicycle wheel that he was whipping. Past memories came back and he saw the little boy who was catching fish and then throwing the fish back in the river. The boy reminded him of the river bank boy wearing rags. Krishna tried his luck. He stopped the boy and said: “I know your dad. We played together when we were small. My friend even gave him his t-shirt. The name of my friend is Rahul Hosanee. Do you by any chance know where the family is?”

“I have heard the name from my mother. I remember my father telling me of the story of how he got an unexpected Christmas gift from two little boys.”

Krishna shook hands with him and said: “It is indeed a small world. I am so happy to meet you, young man. Can you take me to your parents’ place? I need to know where my friend Rahul is.”

"Yes, I am sure my mother will know. The other day I heard her say that the family went to live in another village. You can come with me. I will show you where I live and you can ask my mother."

The little boy went into the house by the back door. Krishna waited at the front door. After a few minutes he saw an old lady in a white sari drawing the curtain. The old lady looked hard at him. She opened the door ajar and asked Krishna what he wanted.

"I am looking for my friend Rahul Hosanee. He used to live not far from you. Can you please tell me where I can find him?"

"I really do not know what my grandson has told you but we do not know these people. She then closed the door on the nose of Krishna.

Krishna stayed in front of the door a few minutes not knowing if he should knock at the door but decided to return to his grandparent's place. He wanted to change his tickets so that he could stay longer to search for his lost friend but pressure of work made it impossible. He left the village to the airport with a heavy heart leaving behind his childhood and part of his life in Morcellement St. Andre.

Sanjeev and Shakti stayed behind to help with the packing and to look into all legal matters for the selling of the house.

While going through his dad's papers, Sanjeev saw an envelope addressed to him. He opened the envelope and started to read the note to his wife and his mother: "Son,

if I die before your mother, I would not like her to stay on her own. I know she is stronger than me and can manage on her own. The house is too big for her. She is too independent to ask somebody to stay with her. I am in a dilemma. I certainly do not want her to go in a home. I hope I will not ask you too much if you could encourage her to go with you to Manchester. I know you and Shakti will care for her. She loves you both much. I know how old people are treated in homes, even in the most expensive ones. Your mother and I visited the elders in homes regularly. We could not believe what we saw and the treatment they get was like in a horror film. This broke our hearts. Old people who have given their lives for their children and yet they are sent to home where they are mistreated. They are frail and do not have the energy to complain. The care workers are rough on them and if they pee in their bed they have to stay in this dirty sheet until the next morning. Some of them told us how they were beaten and food forced into their mouths as they took too long to eat. We always went with plenty of food, clothes, towels and bed sheets. We helped them to eat and put them in clean bed sheets. Our visits brought light on these miserable faces. They sometimes held our hands and did not let go. We, very often, find it difficult to leave them especially when they started to cry and asked us to stay longer. Once we met a young man who was visiting his mother. We could not believe it when we saw this young man sobbing like a child. He told us that when his father died, his mother could not stay on her own. After the funeral he decided to put his mother in a home. The old lady agreed and said that she would make friends and gave her son her

blessings before the son returned to England. The man told us that when he took his mother to visit the home, she was overwhelmed. The place was clean, the food looked delicious and the staff were charming. He agreed on the costly price as he thought his mother would be well looked after. He paid monthly through standing orders. He left the place with a light heart thinking that his mother was in a safe place and in a good environment where she would make friends. He could not visit every year but was posting clothes that he bought from Marks and Spencer. He also posted vitamins for his mother. He got the shock of his life when he saw the dirty state in which her mum was. All her clothes were rags and the Marks and Spencer clothes were nowhere to be found. He was thinking seriously of taking his mum with him to England but was not sure if the decision was correct. *"My mum has never travelled. She will have to get used to a different way of living, different culture and different weather. Furthermore, my wife is British and does not know how to cook Mauritian food,"* he told us still sobbing. We encouraged him and told him that he was taking the right decision and once his mum would get her health back and could stand on her feet, she would be happy living with him and his wife. We even told him that she would get on well with her daughter-in-law and could even teach her how to prepare Mauritian food."

"When we left the home on that day, our decision was taken that neither of us will go to a home. I have told your mother that if I die before her, she will have to stay with you in England. I know she is a strong person and



can take decisions and live on her own with the maids. In fact, she is stronger than me both emotionally and physically but I do not want her to stay on her own.”

Reading this letter, Sanjeev told his mother: “You see mum, even dad wants you to stay with us. You will get along well with Shakti and you know how much Krishna is attached to you. There is a shop along our road that sells a variety of exotic spices and herbs. You will not miss your Mauritian food. I am now having doubts whether I should put this house for sale. This is our legacy. This is where my umbilical cord is planted and there is even a breadfruit tree that has grown on it. As both you and dad have been helping elderly people in homes, an idea is coming to my mind. What about turning this house in a different kind of home for the elderly? I will give it a good thought together with Krishna. I am sure the residents in our home will be as happy as the fruits, flowers, birds, bees and butterflies of your gardens.”

The grandmother adapted well in Manchester. She participated in the organisation of an Indian wedding for Krishna. She even went with Shakti and Krishna to buy the wedding sari for Audrey. She connected well with Audrey’s parents and was proud to sit in the front bench next to Audrey’s parents at the Church ceremony. She even did a few steps with her son at the wedding reception.

But part of Sarita remained in Mauritius. She could not get over the death of her husband. She did yearly prayers on the day of husband's death in a puja room that her son had made available for her.

A few years after the wedding Sarita passed away quietly in her sleep.

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## CHAPTER 8

### ***BACK TO THE VILLAGE***

The responsibility of taking Sarita's ash to Morcellement St Andre fell on Krishna.

Before leaving, Krishna had a discussion with his mum, dad and Audrey and apprised them that the time was ripe to open a home for the elderly in his grandparent's village. They all found it a brilliant idea. Sanjeev gave Krishna all the legal papers. They all agreed on "Roy for Joy" as the name of the home.

After putting the ash in the back garden, Audrey and Krishna planted a chalta tree near the breadfruit tree in memory of both grandparents. The inscription "*Two souls and two hearts bind together.*" They both did a little prayer and Krishna said: "*we are sure these two souls will find a good body. They have given so much to the community.*"

The family's lawyer was called to the house to start the legal work for the home. Before taking the plane, Krishna searched for Rahul. Seeing how upset Krishna was, the lawyer promised to help with the search. "I will let you know if I have positive news on your friend, do not worry Krishna. Mauritius is a small place and a family cannot just disappear like that."

After a few months of their return to Manchester, Krishna told his parents that he and his wife had decided to take a long holiday.

"Yes, you need this well-deserved honeymoon which you could not take. Keep in touch while you are away and give us a call on the date of your return." Sanjeev told his son.

"We might not return dad. We are seriously thinking of going back to Mauritius after our holiday to make the wish of granddad come true."

"What a fantastic move. Wow! "Roy for Joy" a reality. A dream comes true. I really cannot believe it. Wherever they are, your grandparents must be very proud of you Krishna."

After two and a half years of travelling, Krishna and Audrey returned back to Mauritius with their two-year old baby, Jane. They bought a car, stayed in a bungalow on the beach for over a year before finding what they were looking for in Beau-Bassin. A four bedroom house with a mezzanine which would be converted into Krishna's office. A front and a back garden, a huge veranda that faced a swimming pool. They decided to do more renovation to the house to suit Audrey's taste of having a state-of-the-art kitchen with all appliances as well as a playroom for Jane.

"Before we get stuck with the renovation of the house, I have urgent matters to attend to. I am leaving early tomorrow morning and will come back late. Do not wait for me for either lunch or dinner," Krishna told his wife.

"We have just moved into this new house and we did agree that our priority would be the renovation of the house. We have so many things to do, Krishna, now you tell me that you have other urgent matters to attend to?"

This is nonsense Krishna. I do not buy this kind of argument.”

“Listen, you remember how I told you about my childhood friend. I talked about him so much that you even said that you felt that you knew him in person. Yes, Audrey, I need to find him. I need to know what has happened to him. Even if he is dead, I need to know where his tomb is. I will not be at peace with myself if I do not know what has happened to Rahul. He is part of me, part of my life, part of my childhood. He is the only brother I have.”

Early the next morning, Krishna went to Morcellement St. Andre. He knocked at all doors in the village but nobody wanted to hear the name “Rahul”. He drove slowly from one village to another. Nothing! He came back home late at night very disappointed. He could hardly eat and play with Jane.

He left again the next morning. But this time he decided to do the small lanes of the surrounding villages. In one of the small lanes, he found an old man sitting on a rock in front of a house. Krishna said to himself: “I am sure this chacha (uncle) will be able to tell me about the Hosanee family. Old people have visual memories of people they have met in their lives. I need to know why there are so many secrets around Rahul and his family.”

Krishna walked to the old chacha. He looked at him. With a lump in his throat, he said: “Rahul, what are you doing here sitting on that rock? You look like an old man. You have changed tremendously; but I would have recognised you anywhere in the world.”

"I am not Rahul. I am nobody. Please leave me alone."

Seeing his friend hit Krishna and his nervous system went into gear trying to get the right words. Tears went streaming down his cheeks. He tried to breathe properly before he could say: "Rahul, do you remember that day when two little boys slit their thumbs and rub their blood together? We are brothers Rahul. How can you not recognise your own brother?"

"No! no! no! I do not have any brother and I do not know what you are talking about."

Krishna sat down near Rahul's feet. Took his hands and said: "Please Rahul, tell me what has happened. I have been looking for you for the past years. You stopped writing to me. I did not even see you at the funeral of my grandfather. My mother had been looking for you too. She wanted to put you in charge of the house before her departure with me to Manchester. I have plans for you my brother."

Very slowly and with a shaky voice Rahul started to talk.

"After my studies at the Mauritius Institute of Education, I was appointed as an English Teacher at a State Secondary School. At the School, I met Jeanine who was three years older than me. We worked in the same Department. In fact, she was my boss. Jeanine was well appreciated by management as she was the one who raised the standard of the School. The School was going to the dogs and teachers did not want to work there. Jeanine got a promotion from her former post and was asked to work in our School. What was supposed to be a punitive transfer because of Jeanine's ethnicity proved to

be the contrary. Jeanine believed in the power of education to change lives. Her method of teaching became top priority. She made quality education her mantra. Each year the school produced at least one laureate and Jeanine was promoted Head of the English Department.”

“We fell madly in love and decided to get married. My parents did not have any objection although Jeanine was a Creole with dark skin and curly African type hair. I still remember my father saying: ‘I am a Muslim, your mother is Hindu, you practice both Islam and Hinduism and now we will have a daughter in law who is a Creole. What a family?’ In fact, my parents were proud to have a daughter-in-law like Jeanine. They said they could not have expected better.”

“Your grandparents did all the arrangements for an Indian wedding in their big veranda. The ceremony was presided by your granddad as he did not want any refusal by any Hindu Priest. Jeanine seemed to know all the rituals and even explained to me all the rituals. The ceremony was held before a sacred fire with little dried mango twigs, from the garden, dipped in purified butter. Jeanine explained that the sacred fire was a symbol of purification. We did the seven steps around the fire holding hands. Your granddad highlighted that the seven steps were for eternal friendship in our journey through life together. He gave us specific blessing in each round. The blessings were, for food, strength, wealth, happiness, children and devotion, among others. Your granddad made us recite some mantras. With tears in my

eyes, I placed a red tikka on the forehead of Jeanine. A red tikka that Jeanine always wore.

Rahul told Krishna that Jeanine's parents, the neighbours and the staff of the School were all invited.

"Only the staff of the school turned up for the wedding. I have pictures of Jeanine in her beautiful red sari with mehndi on her hands and feet. She looked so beautiful with all the garlands of fresh flowers around her neck and on her hair. It was indeed a grand ceremony followed by a beautiful vegetarian meal served on banana leaves."

"Your grandparents even arranged for a little church wedding in the afternoon. The chapel was beautifully decorated with fresh flowers and tall candles. We both kept our Indian outfits. Your grandparents and my parents walked with us along the aisle to the alter. A priest of Indian origin did an astounding ceremony and, in his sermon, he mentioned Romans 12:16 of the epistle to the Romans in the New Testament by Apostle Paul in Corinth "*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight*".

"The priest went on to explain that according to Lord Krishna in the Bhagavat Gita "*If a man loves a woman and if a woman loves a man, but families are against their love and marriage, then it is called as Dharma if both man and woman run away with each other and spend their lives peacefully somewhere else getting married. This is what Arjun did.*"



Rahul told Krishna how they were blessed to have Krishna's grandparents and his own parents who supported them and believed in their love and happiness. "Jeanine's parents were dead against this relationship and refused to meet me. They rejected their daughter."

"When the priest talked about the different cultures and religions and highlighted the strength and vitality of each religion to shape a better Mauritius, my parents and I felt really proud to be of mixed cultures especially on that day in a Catholic Church. The priest gave us back our dignity that was robbed from us by so many people who have refused to mix with us. You are aware Krishna how some of my friends looked down upon me because of my Muslim father."

"With the help of your grandparents, my father added a room to our house and we stayed with my parents. Jeanine got on really well with them and learnt how to cook all these beautiful curries and parathas."

"We bought two bicycles and went everywhere on our bicycles including going to work."

"Apart from your grandparents, my parents and a few colleagues we did not have any friends. The neighbours sneered at Jeanine and were rough on her. We even heard them say: *"How can decent people like Amit and Santi accept that their son brings a prostitute to their house? Not only a prostitute but getting married to her?"* For the villagers, being given that Jeanine was the Afro looking type with dark skin and curly hair, she had to be a prostitute. And yet Jeanine was the best teacher in our

School and she was the teacher of some of the children of the villagers.”

“After one and a half year of blissful married life, Jeanine gave birth to the most beautiful girl. A real mixture of all the communities under the sun of Mauritius, even Chinese as Jeanine had also some Chinese ancestors. My parents were on top of the world and cared a lot for the baby. We all agreed on the name “Angel” as she looked like an angel with wings missing. Jeanine did not have any problem when she had to go back to work as our little girl was in the safe hands of my parents.”

“Both Jeanine and I played a lot with our little girl and when it was time for her to go to pre-primary school, we decided to keep her at home. The whole family looked after her education and played educational games with her. Our girl was brilliant and we could see that she had a bright future in front of her.”

Rahul started to make convulsive gasps. Krishna held him tight and told him not to say any more.

“It is now or never Krishna. You are my brother you have a right to know why we did not attend the funeral of your grandparents.”

With a sob of despair, Rahul threw himself on Krishna’s shoulder, cried his heart out. He tried to talk but could not. Krishna took out the bottle of water that he had with him and asked Rahul to have a sip. It took a few minutes for Rahul to regain his composure and started to talk again.

"Our little Angel, went to the primary school of the village. She did really well and was on top of the class. My dad stopped work so that he could drop her at school and get her in the afternoon. They walked as my dad was afraid that an accident might happen if he used his bicycle. Worse than accident happened. We lost our girl."

"How? Was she knocked by a car?" Krishna uttered in shock.

Rahul could not talk. He started to stammer and had to wait a few minutes before he tried to talk again. Krishna could not understand what Rahul was saying as he was making convulsive gasps and shedding so much tears at the same time.

"Do not say anymore my brother."

"No! You have to know. I have suffered intense emotional pains, agony and distress that I believe the time is now. I must talk. You are a Godsend Krishna. You are the only person in this world with whom I can share all these pains."

Krishna held Rahul's hand and sat close to him on the rock. "Go on Rahul, tell me what you have on your heart. Puts words on your pains. Let your heart talk. This will help to ease the pains."

Rahul drank a few drops of water then started to speak slowly.

"Our Angel had a difficult time at school. She was very often traumatised. She was mocked because of her curly hair and dark skin. Parents were wild because she was on top of the class. They said loudly that she was lazy

and stupid; was on top of the class because teachers gave her good marks being given that her parents were teachers in the next-door State Secondary School. We talked to her and told her not to listen to them. We told her that she was the best and will always be the best. She cared for other children and helped them with their school work. She often sat with them so that they could finish their homework.”

“On her 7<sup>th</sup> birthday when my father went to fetch her from school, she was nowhere to be found. He looked everywhere and went to see the Head Mistress but her office was closed. The cleaner told him that there was nobody in the school. My father was like a mad man. He sprinted back home, took his bicycle and looked everywhere. He finally telephoned me at the School. Jeanine and I rushed back home. With the help of your grandparents and their staff we did a search in the village. We looked in the woods around, near the river banks, but our little girl was nowhere to be found. We even thought she was drowned and my dad jumped in the river to look for her. By then it was getting quite late. We went to the police to make a complaint about our missing daughter. Fortunately, your parents were with us otherwise the police would not have bothered to take our complaint. With the persistence and the threat of your dad, the police agreed to contact the Emergency Police Intervention Unit. The Intervention Unit sent a helicopter to help with the search. Around four to five policemen searched the woods accompanied by dogs. Two emergency intervention policemen with all their gears searched in the river. Two policemen finally saw the frail

body of our daughter under a tree. She was naked and could hardly breath. She had been raped and had blood all over her body.”

Krishna had goosepimples. He had tears in his eyes and was not sure of being able to take more but plucked his courage and gently said: “Take your time Rahul. You do not have to continue if you cannot.”

“No, I want to. This is the first time I am talking of what we have endured. We took our Angel to the hospital. She was under artificial respiration. Your parents wanted to make arrangements to send her to the best hospital in India but the Doctor said it was too late. They said that even the best Doctors would not be able to reconstruct all the damage done to her frail body. She died after a week. While the police were doing their investigations and interviewing people, believe it or not Krishna, some neighbours said they saw me taking our daughter from school on that day and they were sure that I was the one who raped my daughter.”

“Oh my God! No! I can’t believe it. ‘How can people be so cruel!’”

“This is how far hatred can go, Krishna. The rumour spread like wild fire in a village where gossiping is a way of life. The enquiry went for a few months and the police could not find the criminal. My dad blamed himself and said if he had been to the school earlier this would never have happened. On the other hand, my mum blamed herself saying that it was our Angel’s birthday and she should have insisted that we did not send her to school. My devastated parents putting all the blame on themselves

for this tragedy. Can you believe it? And yet we all wanted Angel to go to school as my mother insisted of preparing a big surprise for her. She walked to the Chinese shop to buy balloons, candles and all sorts of little decorations. We did not have an oven but she made a steamed cake which she decorated with begonia flowers.”

“The people in Morcellement St. Andre stopped talking to us. They spitted when they saw us pass by. Some of them shouted rapist when they saw me.”

“We thought that moving house and going to a different village would help. We moved into this little house without even informing your grandparents. This house was given to my dad by his grandparents. The neighbours are fantastic here. They did not ask us any questions. On the other hand, they helped with furniture, pots and pans as well as other things that we needed for the house. They even brought food for us during the first couple of weeks.”

“My parents were so devastated that the gnawing pains were eating them slowly. They could hardly eat and they stopped going out. My dad even stopped going for his Friday prayers at the Mosque. They became so thin that they could hardly walk. After one year my mum passed away in her sleep. My dad had a massive heart attack and died a few days after my mum’s death.”

“As for Jeanine she stopped going to work and walked around the house like a crazy woman. All she did was having imaginary conversations with Angel. She even played Lego and other games with her and clapped her

hands to tell Angel who intelligent she was. At night she slept with the picture of Angel. I did my best to encourage her to see a doctor but she refused saying that she was happy having her daughter staying at home and playing with her. One day when I came back from work, I saw her on the floor. She.....”

Rahul could not continue his phrase. Krishna held him tight and they both cried.

“Krishna, I really do not know what kept me alive. I lost all my family and could not even take their ash to our village. I would have so much liked to plant four trees in their remembrance.”

“There is a cause for everything. You are alive waiting for me to find you. The four trees will be planted in the village. This is my solemn promise to you and your family.”

“No! It is too late now.”

“It is not. I lost you, Rahul. I never thought I would see you again. I have a big project in mind and I want you to be part of it. From now on you will always be by my side. I will take you with me to our house. My wife Audrey and my daughter Jane will be overwhelmed to meet my lost brother. I have talked so much about you that Audrey has always said how much she would like to meet you in person. This is indeed a dream come true. Let us go inside and get only a few basic items that are close to you. The rest you can leave behind.”

They went inside the two-bedroom small house. The kitchen, toilet, and bathroom were outside.

The walls were covered with pictures of Rahul, Amit, Santi and wedding pictures. The picture of Jeanine in her red sari and Rahul in his Indian outfit and his red turban was stunning. There was one picture where Jeanine looked at Rahul in his eyes and they placed their hands together in a sign of respect to each other. Their garlands of fresh flowers kissed each other. The most beautiful picture was the one when they were walking around the flaming hawan-kund (recipient for fire ritual) showing their feet decorated with mehndi. The biggest framed picture was that of Angel.

“Oh! My God. She is gorgeous. The different Mauritian ethnic features in one person. She does bear her name, Angel.”

Rahul did not say anything.

He started to put all the pictures in a rattan basket and suddenly said: “You remember this Krishna? Our story book *“The Leaves and the Birds by Rahul and Krishna”*. I know this book by heart. I have kept my promise and each time I missed you I went through the book.”

While Krishna was helping Rahul to place pictures in the basket, a piece of paper from Rahul’s pocket fell on the floor. Rahul quickly seized the paper from Krishna and said: “This piece of paper is my totem and it remains with me all the time. This is what has kept me going. Each time I need help, I touch this totem carefully and it helps me to gain some confidence in myself. I did that before you came to me Krishna. May be Jeanine has guided you to come and meet me on this rock. This is what Jeanine wrote in a note she left for me on the table



before she did the irreversible. There was a Deeya lighted with a wick near the note as well as a bowl of her tikka, the vermilion paste that she always applied on the forehead since the day we got married.

*Rahul, my love*

*I have been blessed to have you, mama, papa and Angel in my life. You have all showed me what unconditional love means. We have had a great life together. By going to meet Angel, I know I am taking the right decision. We will look after you and will guide your steps. Each time you need our help just call our names and we will shine around you like a floodlight. Angel is waiting for me. I have to go now but my soul and that of Angel will always accompany you. You have a bright future waiting for you Rahul. Do not hesitate to leave everything behind and start a new life.*

*Jeanine"*

"She committed suicide, Krishna. When I returned home from work on that fatal day, she was on the ground with her wedding sari tied around her neck. I tried my best to revive her but her body was cold. She must have done this as soon as I left for work."

Krishna put his palm together and asked Rahul to do the same.

"Let us chant the Gayatri Mantra together. Gayatri being the mother of all scriptures will help us both. The mantra will light our way and Mother Gayatri will protect you just as Jeanine wants to protect you wherever she is now. The Gayatri prayer is a complete prayer that will protect

and liberate you Rahul. The prayer will illuminate and inspire you throughout your life. Let us meditate in front of the Deeya that Jeanine has left for you. Let us light it so that it's light can guide you. Jeanine will always be at your side. "

They both chanted:

*Om Bhur Bhuvah Swah*

*Tat-savitur Varenyam*

*Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi*

*Dhiyo Yonah Prachodayat*

"Do what Jeanine wants best for you. You can take the Deeya and the pictures leaving the rest behind."

Rahul did as he was told by Krishna. Apart from Angel's clothes and that of Jeanine there was nothing in the house to take. Before packing the rest of the pictures, Rahul held a yellow gold crucifix pendant firm in his fist. "My parents offered this to Jeanine when Angel was born. I saw the cross next to the Deeya when I came back home this fatal afternoon. Let us say another prayer, Krishna."

They both put their palms together and Rahul said:

*"O heavenly Father and Mother, I am now the shadow of a great loneliness. I know that You love my Jeanine and my Angel who are now in heaven rejoicing with You. Grant me the strength I need to bear and help me with the opportunities that my brother Krishna is offering me."*

They both said "Amen" with one voice, bent their heads, meditated for a few minutes before Krishna said:

“Jeanine will always light your path, Rahul. On our way to Beau- Bassin, we will stop at a shop and I will get you some new clothes. We have a guest room with attached bathroom, toilet and a small kitchenette. It will be yours for as long as need be. Do you feel better now? Do you feel some kind of liberation? I know it will take time but let Jeanine, the bible and the Gayatri Mantra guide you and heal your pains!”

Once at home, Rahul was taken to his room. The first thing he did was put the Deeya and the cross on his bedside table.

After a good bath, well shaved and new clothes on, Rahul went in the living room where a most welcoming family was waiting for him.

Audrey holding Jane on her hip, put Rahul at ease by saying: “I know you even before meeting you, Rahul. Not a day goes by without Krishna mentioning your name. I know all the details of the Christmas he spent with you and accompanying you to the Mosque. He has been blessed to have known you. You are part of our family and we hope it will always be like that.”

They ate a sumptuous dinner, prepared by Audrey, with their fingers.

“Thank you so much. This is the first good meal I have had for a long time.”

Rahul thanked them again and before he retired to his room Krishna told Rahul, “Have a good night sleep brother. Do not hesitate to shout if there is anything you

need. At breakfast tomorrow we will discuss the project,”.

At breakfast, Krishna discussed the project with Rahul and showed him the design of a huge building. “We have no time to waste Rahul. Look at the plans that the best architect of the country made for us. Can you recognise the place?”

“No!”

“OK, this is how the house of my grandparents will look like once all the works are done. From now on you are in charge. Do not look at me like that? I will be by your side and only professionals will work with you, Mr. General Manager of Roy for Joy, the first residential centre for the elderly in the North of Mauritius. It will be a luxurious place with state-of-the-art technology, a gymnasium, a swimming pool and a therapeutic garden among others. Qualified and trained care workers will look after the elders. Those who can pay will pay but those who cannot will only be asked to give a token fee.”

“Rahul, I will make you the King of Morcellement St Andre. Not any kind of King but the type of Henry V who worried about the plight of the poor. I know you are hard-working and will not only look after the affairs of Roy for Joy but also the whole village and why not, may be, the North of Mauritius as a whole. You are intelligent, caring, you know how to talk to people and you will do justice to all those in need, especially our elders. You have lost your parents, your wife and your daughter, Rahul. May be this is God’s wish as HE/SHE knows you will save the lives of many. Your Angel, Jeanine and your

parents will protect and guide you. You speak the language of the people. You are fluent in Creole, Bhojpuri, English and French. Through you, people will get back their lost identity, their dignity that has been robbed from them will be restored. You will give love and peace a chance. All those who sneered at you, your Angel, your family and your wife will beg you for a job. You will be able to plant four beautiful trees in this huge garden in memory of your four loved ones.”

“You have lost your biological family but you will get dozens of new families. You will be able to look after them and they will love you as their own grandson. You will be able to transfer all the love you have in you to them. Furthermore, always remember that the guest room we have here will always be yours. In fact, Audrey and I have planned to have an outer house will all amenities. This will be yours any time you wish to come and relax. The work at Roy for Joy will be tough but I will make sure that you have two or three Assistants and good professional staff.”

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# *Part 3*

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## ***CHENNAI***

Jane had the shock of her life when she arrived at Chennai Airport. In her wildest dream she did not imagine that the airport was so big. She would never have been able to find her way in this condensed human tide had it not been for a man holding a signage with her name on it. Jane was pleasantly surprised by the courteousness of the driver. He refused to let Jane push the trolley. "No, Madam. Look after your children and be careful. I will look after your luggage. Is this your first time in Chennai?" The driver said in an English that Jane found a bit difficult to understand.

The driver did some casual conversation trying to put the Roy family at ease. "I am a native of Chennai. I will be honest with you, Madam. I suggest you hold your children tight. We have just had a case of an English lady who lost her child. I do not want to frighten you. Quite a few foreigners encounter different sorts of problems. Sometimes they cannot find their way around or how to look for a transport or even where to go to look for accommodation. In your case, all should be fine. I work for the hotel where you will be staying. You will enjoy Chennai, Madam. We have good cultural activities that your children will love. Chennai is indeed an exciting destination. It is a cosmopolitan place but I advise you to be careful and always ask the hotel if you need a taxi."

Jane started to get the fright of her life having doubts if she had taken the right decision travelling with two small girls. Then, she said to herself "I must know the roots of

Niraj. I must find out why such a caring son who looked after his sick mother single-handed, a soft-hearted dad and a fantastic husband changed so much. The pains of being adopted must have gnawed him. Maybe he was in denial and hence kept on saying his real parents were his adopted parents and had no wish to look for his birth mother.

The driver took Jane out of her thoughts. "If there is there anything, I can do for you and your children, Madam, please, do not hesitate. As I said I am a native of Chennai and I can even ask my wife to come to your hotel if you need any guidance on shopping."

"No! Thank you! And thank you for all the precious advice. I really appreciate but I will not stay long in Chennai. Once we have relaxed, looked around a little bit, we will take a plane to Kerala. Give me your telephone number. I might call you on our way back from Kerala so that you can give us a taste of Chennai."

Jane went back into her deep thought again while the driver was taking them to the hotel. "Yes, I must know why my husband who looked so well after his family, who cared for his mother like a baby, bathed her daily, took all his leave to be with his mother, changed so much. When the twins were born by CS, he was the one who woke up at night to feed them and change their nappies. Too late now. What is done is done. Nobody advised me to come to India. I must now face the music with two small children."



On reaching the hotel Jane told her daughters: "Girls, let me hold your hands very tight. Loosing you will be the end of me."

"Why are you talking like that mama? This is very frightening." Jinny said.

"All I know about this country is from books. I also read an article about children being abducted to be sold to rich people. I have heard a lot about child trafficking and how these young girls are sold and then were forced to do sex work or sent overseas to work like maids. I will explain all the traumatic experiences abducted girls go through once we have taken our bath, relaxed and have a good dinner. You are both intelligent and big enough to learn some of the traumatic experiences of these girls."

The next day after breakfast the same driver picked mother and girls for a guided tour of Chennai. Breakfast consisted of masala dosa, idly and other spicy food. The Chef kindly agreed to make a continental breakfast served with fresh fruit and hot chocolate for them.

The driver suggested a few temples. After visiting one temple, the girls said they had enough and wanted to see more interesting places. The driver took them to St. Mary's Church and explained that it was the oldest surviving churches that was built by the British. They were mesmerised by the glass windows and the frescos.

By then it was time for lunch. The driver took them to a restaurant that provided a wide range of dishes from across India. They were introduced to the manager who suggested a not too spicy special menu. The girls were fascinated by all the tandoors and the chef making

parathas in front of them. He threw the paratha like a disk in the air until it became as thin as a round muslin. "These parathas are called roomaali parathas. They are as thin as a handkerchief and handkerchief in Hindi is roomaal," the Chef explained. They had sweet lassi with their meal. Jane had to stop them from eating too many mithai. "You will have an upset stomach. I will ask the Chef to put some in a box to take with us."

The girls felt sleepy after their hearty meal; but when the driver suggested to take them to the Snake and Children's Park, both Jenny and Jinny opened their eyes wide and shouted "Yes, yes, please mama let us go to the park."

They could not believe their eyes when they saw the gamut of snakes and reptiles. At first, they thought the snakes were made of plastic. Their different colours sometimes bright and changing into the different shades of the colours of the rainbow; their lively forms and sizes made them look unreal. The girls talked among themselves and said that they the snakes were not real and were controlled by a remote control. "I will show you that they are real," a warden affectionately said. He touched one of them with a long stick. The girls jumped with excitement.

After the Snake Park the girls played a bit in the Children's Park while Jane sat on a bench in deep thought on how to tell the girls that their father was adopted in Kerala. Jenny and Jinny knew that their father was adopted but did not know the details. When they turned five, in a clear and simple language Niraj and Jane explained to them that their dad was very special as he

was chosen by his parents who were eager to have him. But the girls did not know that their dad came from Kerala.

Jenny and Jinny made friends with two girls in the park and wanted to stay with them until Jane spotted a kulfi merchant and offered all the four girls kulfi. The new friends thanked Jane profusely and went away licking their kulfi cones.

On the suggestion of the driver to take a stroll on Marina Beach, Jane kindly explained to the driver that coming from Mauritius, Marina Beach might not be interesting for the children.

"This is a famous sightseeing in Chennai, Madam. I am sure your children will love it. The sand is of a silver colour and the sunset is breath-taking."

"This is very kind of you. Take us to the hotel so that we can have an early sleep and be fresh to take the plane tomorrow morning. We will wait for you at 6.00 am at the reception."

After dinner Jane told the girls that instead of sitting near the swimming pool to have a lemonade as promised, they would all go in the room so that she could have a conversation with them and she also needed to write to granddad and grandma. "They must be out of their minds by now. We did not say goodbye. I did not tell anybody about our holiday as I wanted it to be a surprise. After the email I will tell you what my plans are. But most of all I want you to enjoy this holiday and ask questions when you are not sure about places that we will be visiting. I know this is a culture shock, being your

first time in India. I chose Kerala as I have heard that it is different from other regions of India. The level of education is quite high, people are well mannered and they will treat us well. I have booked a beautiful hotel in Ernakulum and I have also booked a car with a driver so that we can visit interesting places.”

Jane finally told the girls that they were on holiday but at the same time she wanted to know the roots of their dad. “We told you that your dad was adopted but we did not tell you that he is from Kerala.”

They jumped on the bed and said: “This is great, mum, we will see the family of daddy. We will see our aunts, cousins and other relatives.”

“Quiet girls, I have always told you that we should not sell the wolf skin before killing it. One step at a time. We will know more once we are in Kerala.”

Jane put the television on for the girls and went on her laptop.

*"Dear dad and mum*

*First of all, let me apologise profusely. You must be out of mind by now not knowing where we are. I am very sorry I did not leave any message for you or Niraj as for once I wanted to be the independent young woman I used to be and knew how to take decisions all my myself. I planned to give Jenny and Jinny a big surprise by taking them on a short holiday during their two weeks' vacation. I kept it as a secret as I did not want the girls to talk about it. Furthermore, I would have lost all my vacation and casual leaves that I have accumulated over*

*the years. Most important of all, it was about time that I understand how a caring person can change into a bad person without any reason. I do not have to tell you how Niraj has always been good to me and the girls. He respected you a lot and we all could count on him on any issues or problems. Our welfare and comfort were so important that we always came first in his life. He sacrificed himself on many fronts just for our wellbeing. Even when food was put on the table be it at home or in a restaurant, he served me and the girls first before serving himself. I tried to understand when and why he started to change. He was rough on me and fortunately not on the girls. I know his attitudes towards you also changed. I do not know if the fact that he was adopted is now having an impact on him. If, yes, I need to know. I love him and I want to help him.*

*Niraj loved his mum and did everything for her. Apart from our family he does not have anybody else. Is he struggling with two losses? That of his biological parents as well as his adopted parents. I know he has lost confidence in himself and is dealing with emotional challenges. He probably is suffering from not knowing his birth parents and even thinking that he may have siblings and grandparents. He has never talked about this. I somehow feel that seeing you both caring for me and your grandchildren may have an effect on him. Although well surrounded by his daughters, his wife and his in-laws, may be, his grief has always remained deep inside. To add insult to injury his dad has now a biological daughter. He has lost all contacts with his dad and has refused to meet the wife of his father and his*

*half-sister. I am sure he feels even more rejected now that his dad has a biological daughter. I do not know if Niraj has information on his biological parents but I need to find out. I know his self-esteem is very low and this is why he is always pretending that he is a strong. Hence, may be, all this violence.*

*It is important that I know his birth mother and his pre-adoption history. Knowing his roots will surely give him back his lost identity and I will be in a better position to help him or even try to encourage him to go for counselling.*

*I love you dad and mum. I am so sorry. I have no secrets for you but I had to keep this one all to myself. I am sure that my search for the truth on Niraj will help our fantastic family to be stronger as Niraj will be a better person. Finding the key to unlock this secret is important to me and our family.*

*Jenny and Jinny had a great day enjoying the snake park in Chennai. They even made friends with two girls of their age. They are now watching TV.*

*I will write to you again soon. I love you loads.*

*Jane"*

Jane called the girls who were watching a cartoon. "We are busy mum. We are watching Hansel and Gretel."

"You have this film at home and you have watched it so many times. I have finished writing an email to granddad and grandma and I would like you to read it before I send it. You are quite big now and we should not have any secrets, especially family secrets."

"OK, OK. You win."

Jinny and Jenny left the couch and Jane started to read the e-mail. They were speechless and started to stutter.

"We did not know that dad was facing so many problems."

In all their innocence they added "We did not know that dad has a half-sister. This means that we have another granddad and an auntie. This is great. We would like to see our granddad and our aunt when we return to Mauritius. Will you take us there?"

"It is not as easy as that. Let us discuss all that once we are back in Mauritius. For now, put a little note to grandma and granddad. They will love to hear from you."

With one finger Jinny typed "We love you. We will buy a gift for you both. Lots of kisses. Jenny and Jinny."

It did not take long for Krishna to reply to his daughter.

*"Jane,*

*Your mother and I are very upset with what you have done. You should have known that your disappearance without leaving a note behind would drive us mad. Yes, we went nuts and were like two insane persons looking for our daughter and grandchildren. We are still trembling although the police found your car at the airport. They found your car after a long search by foot, by car, by dog and squadron helicopter. We even found a girl who looked very much like you. She was raped in a remote place. When we saw her face, we were sad for her but relieved at the same time that she was not you.*

*It is very irresponsible on your part to take two young children and go to the unknown. Tell us where you are and we will take the first plane to come and meet you. But meanwhile be careful, stay in the best hotel and use the hotel driver for any internal travelling.*

*We love you and wait for your answer to buy our tickets  
Mum and Dad"*

...

*"Dear mum and dad*

*You have raised me to be an independent young lady and I will always be grateful for that. This is what I am enjoying right now. Being able to make decisions by myself and in control of my destiny and that of my two girls. I love you and will always be grateful for all you have done and are doing for me, Jinny and Jenny. Please do not spoil what I have decided to do. I promise to keep in touch and if I need you to come over, I will let you know.*

*Lots of love*

*Jane"*

Early the next morning Jane and the girl boarded the first plane to Kerala. They landed in Kerala after two hours where a driver was waiting for them.



## CHAPTER 10

### ***IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH***

Jane and the girls were booked in a Deluxe room accommodating the three of them in a five Star Hotel in Ernakulum. After refreshing themselves, they had a seafood lunch in an upmarket restaurant followed by a visit of a few interesting places under the guidance of Kiran, the driver, who was recommended by the hotel. Jane booked him for the whole week.

Next day after breakfast, the car was waiting for them right on time.

A proud Kiran greeted them with his palm closed and said "Namaskar Madam and beautiful girls. You are in God's own country. You will enjoy Kochi. You can go to the beach where the two beautiful girls can build sandcastles while you, Madam, can visit places near the beach. Your beautiful girls will be safe on the beach and I am sure you will all enjoy the lush surroundings of the beach. You will feel like living in a different world. Or should I say paradise itself."

Jane was impressed by Kiran's English. "I know, Kiran. I have read quite a bit about Kochi and especially Fort Kochi with all its attractions. We would so much like to do some tourism but we have more important business to attend to. May be on our return we can go to visit all these interesting places, especially the museum, and buy some handicrafts to take home. I might also buy some of your fantastic spices. I have also read a lot about

Kumbalangi and how this fishing village can be a model for our own country, Mauritius.”

“Yes, indeed, Madam, this village is the first of its kind in India and is a must to visit. Furthermore, it is not far from your hotel. It has so many natural wonders. The village is surrounded by backwaters and Chinese Fishing Nets cover the island. The aquatic life is very rich. The array of mangroves that separate the land from the water provide a good breeding ground for prawns and a variety of seafood. There is another village nearby which will give you a glimpse of how the villagers live. One of my cousins lives there. It will be a pleasure for me to take you to their home. I am sure they will love meeting you and your daughters. You can learn how our people live.”

“You are so kind Kiran. I really appreciate. There are so many things we can learn from you especially on the protection of the environment. For now, we have to go to a Children’s Home in the town……. let me see my papers.”

Jane had Niraj’s adoption papers with her. She had a quick glance and said: “Yes a town called Aazhakam. Can you take us there now?”

“Of course, Madam. I know the place. I know they have the best Children’s Home in the country. Shall I take you to Mother Theresa Children’s Home, Madam. It is a well-known place. I have taken many foreigners of great reputation there. I even took one or two British and American stars there. They like to visit the place to see for themselves how the orphans are treated. Quite a few of them have adopted children from this Home.”

"Yes, please. This is the place I am looking for."

"OK, Madam. It is not far, about 55kms from here. We will have to drive for over one hour. The roads are good. We can also stop half way, if you so wish, to stretch your legs and have something to drink. I know a place where they have the best coffee and ice cream. Just let me know when you want to stop."

Jane and the girls were impressed by the sceneries. They were so amazed that they did not know whether to look on the right side or the left side of the road. There were palm trees on both sides of the road and in some places, there were high trees hugging themselves. Both girls said: "Shall we do like the trees?" They started to hug their mother.

"This is great girls! You are learning from the trees now."

Kiran could not help smiling and said: "If you wish I can make a little stop at the place I told you. It is a place where you will see even more beautiful trees and a great variety of birds."

Reaching the coffee shop, they decided to sit outside in the magnificent garden under a big tree. Jane ordered coffee for herself, ice cream for the girls and made sure that Kiran got something of his choice to drink and eat. Jane and the girls could not believe their eyes. "I have never seen such beautiful trees and flowers. The air is so pure," Jane said

"Look, mummy the trees are not only hugging and talking to each other, the birds are now taking part in the conversation."

Jane felt really proud with imagination of her two daughters. "I am sure you can tell your friends at school how you heard the trees talking to the birds."

"They will not believe us."

"Why don't you write the conversation of the birds and the trees in your diary?"

The girls let the birds eat from their hands. They enjoyed watching the peacocks walking gracefully and bowing at them as if approving that they were feeding the birds. The proud peacocks followed by the peahens walked around and stopped at each table making sure that all clients saw them. Jenny and Jane tried to caress them without any success but instead they opened their tails. The girls were thrilled seeing the large bright feathers of the peacocks. "Look mummy, the colours are even more beautiful than in the paintings we did."

"Indeed, I did not realise myself of the spectacular beauty and the intricate patterns of these feathers."

Back on the road the driver said, "we should arrive at our destination in less than thirty minutes, Madam".

"We are enjoying this breath-taking scenery so much that we do not mind even if it takes a bit longer. Take your time Kiran. Do not worry. I have never seen such beautiful roads with this great variety of flowers and trees. You are indeed lucky to live in a place like that. Now I understand why Kerala is called God's own country."

True to Kiran's word, they arrived at the Home in less than thirty minutes. Jane rang the gate doorbell. A voice

from the intercom asked her a few questions before the gate was opened. Jane asked Kiran to wait in the Home's parking.

A lady met Jane and the girls near the door and took them to the reception where Jane asked if she could meet the Manager. "First of all, let me apologise. I did not take any appointment as I was not even sure about the place until the driver gave me more information. I am from Mauritius. I am here with my two daughters for only a couple of days."

"Do not worry, Madam, you have come from so far, let me see if the Manager can receive you."

After a few minutes, the receptionist said "Take the corridor, the Manager's office is the first one on your left."

A very shy Jane knocked at the door. "Namaste, Madam."

A plump lady with a large smile in an off-white organza sari stood and did a "Namaste" to Jane. He walked to them and said: "Namaste, young lady and children. What can I do for you?"

Jane and the girls put their palms together for a respectful "Namaste". Jane then tried to touch the lady's feet. The lady put her hand on Jane's head and gently helped her to stand up. "I am very sorry Madam, I should have taken an appointment but being given that I am in Kerala for only a few days, I just took the liberty of coming to see you for something quite urgent. In fact, I

came to know about the address on the guidance of the driver.”

“No! That’s fine. It is a pleasure to receive you. The receptionist said that you are from Mauritius. We have welcomed quite a few people from Mauritius a few years back. So, tell me what can I do for you.”

Jane kindly asked the lady if her daughters could play in the yard with the other children as she wanted to keep the discussion private.

“Of course, my dear. Let me ask one of the care workers to take them around and help them get used to the environment. There are plenty of activities for children of their age that they can join in.”

Once the children left the office, the Manager gave Jane a brief on Mother Theresa Children’s Home. The Home was founded in mid-2000 to protect the needy, destitute, helpless orphans and street children. “We are a non-profit registered Charitable Institution. We started with 12 children and we have now reached over 200 residents. Some children are from the streets of Kerala. They are brought to us by the police, child protection unit and NGOs. We are trying our maximum to provide them with a good education, nutritious food, proper clothing, safe shelter and medical aid. Our aim is to help them become independent and earn a living when they grow up.”

“We also take babies and some of our residents stay with us until the age of 21. We make sure that they are economically independent and have a safe place to stay before they leave our Home. They very often come to

visit us and we have attended weddings of a few of them. Some of them are working for us on a voluntary basis.”

“We do have children who have both parents but due to the vulnerability and the precarious conditions of the parents, NGOs send the children to us until their domestic situation is improved. Even when they go back to their parents, we do proper monitoring to make sure that the children are safe.”

The Manager went on to explain “we are also very sensitive to widows, elderly women and the disabled who very often do not know where to turn to when they are on their own. We also give them shelter.”

“What about your funding?” Jane enquired.

“We function with the help of donations by the local people who believe in the work we are doing. We also have well-wishers around the world. We have had quite a few well-known stars who have not only adopted children from our organisation but they are sponsoring other children. Currently nearly all our children are sponsored. Some families in Kerala donate food on a regular basis. The building itself is a donation and well-wishers have upgraded the building.”

Jane expressed her deep admiration of the place. “It is so clean. The garden is magnificent. The playground is breath-taking.”

“Let us discuss why you are here, then I will take you around so that you can see how we are organised.”

Jane took a file from her bag and showed it to the Manager.

“What would you like to know?”

“This beautiful baby wrapped in the most magnificent white shawl is now my husband. He knows he is adopted but has never tried to find out about his biological parents. We now have two beautiful girls whom you have just met. We all want to know the roots of Niraj, my husband. We would love to meet his biological parents, if possible, and to know if he has brothers and sisters. My daughters and I are so keen to meet the family of my husband. We are in Kerala for only a few days but if need be, we can stay longer to give you time to do your full investigation. We want to go back to Mauritius with good news on the person we love so much.”

“Oh! My God this is so old. I have to ask somebody to look in the archives.”

She called one of her staff and gave her the file that Jane had handed over to her.

After a couple of hours, the staff came back and talked in the Manager’s ear.

“Can I ask you to stay outside for a few minutes, please, Madam. I need to discuss with my staff before I can give you further information.”

The Manager and her staff had a discussion. They decided to call the psychologist of the Home to form part of the discussion with Jane.



Jane was called in and saw a young lady with long silky hair, a broad smile, draped in a beautiful satin silk sari as well as two members of staff draped in blue cotton sari. They all had tag names attached to their cholis.

The Manager opened a thick file on which was written "strictly confidential".

"Namaste Madam, I am Doctor Deeya Khan. I am forming part of this meeting because the Manager feels it is important to have a professional when we disclose any kind of information. All the files here are top confidential. We, normally, do not divulge any information except those who leave their babies and children with us with a signed consent form agreeing that the adopted parents know the biological parents. We have had cases where adopted children come back to us and ask about their biological parents. We do our best to make sure that both parties are comfortable before putting them in touch. In most cases although adopted children meet their biological parents, they prefer to remain with the adopted ones. The case of your husband is not straightforward. But, since you have his documents, we are prepared to give you any official information that we have."

"Yes, please, Doctor. This is a question of life and death. My husband and I have been married for over nine years. He was a good man. Very caring and always helping others. He even looked after his sick mother until she passed away. Since a couple of years, he has changed and I no longer recognise the man I was and is still in love with. He is sometimes violent. He has never said that he would like to meet his biological parents and does

not know that I am here. You are the psychologist and know better. Rightly or wrongly I think that being adopted is coming back to him like a vengeance. I believe he feels he has no identity. The more so that his father has a biological daughter with another woman. He is in denial saying that there is no need for him to find his biological parents. I want to help my husband. I am in love with him. I want to know the truth so that I can help him." Jane pleaded with a whimper in her voice.

"We are here to help you and your children, Madam. We do lots of research on babies brought to us. But it has been impossible to know the roots of this baby. He was brought to us by an old man." Doctor Khan said.

Jane's eyes welled up with tears. She felt a twist in her stomach and asked for a glass of water. She realised how the psychologist was patient and talking to her tactfully and in a friendly manner. She even asked Jane to call her Deeya instead of Dr Khan.

"Take your time Madam. We are here to help you. We know the dilemma you are facing. We are going against our policy by disclosing confidential information. But we feel we have an obligation being given that you have original documents signed by us and you have come from so far. Are you prepared to hear the full story on the baby who came to us and who is now your husband?"

"Yes! I am. I want to help my husband. I want to know why his behaviour has changed so much. I want to know why he is no longer the person he used to be. I want to

know his origins.....” Jane could not continue as by then she was sobbing.

“OK madam. We will tell you the full story. Please feel free to ask questions. We will reply to the best of our capabilities.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

The Manager gently took the file from the psychologist, opened it and in a soft and caring voice said: “An old man who could hardly walk, wearing rags, came to us with a baby in his arms. He told us that it was his fate to see this beautiful baby under a neem tree during a full moon. He explained that with the full moon he could see the angelic face of the baby who was wrapped in a piece of white cloth. He took the baby to an orphanage but management refused to take the baby thinking that he had abducted the baby and wanted to have money. He explained in details that it was his destiny to come across the baby. He said he was poor and could not keep the baby. He even gave the baby a name “Chaand” (meaning moon). While we were listening to him, he was cradling the baby and caressing its head and in a soft voice he said *“Oh! My Chaand, if only I can keep you. You are such a heavenly baby. Yes, you come from heaven. You will bring luck and lots of joy to the person who will have you.”* We felt he was genuine but nevertheless did some research on the old man’s trustworthiness. A nurse took the baby from his arms, gave the baby a good bath and a bottle of milk. The baby was so thirsty that he drank quite fast and vomited in the process. Meanwhile we called the local police. One of our officers and a policewoman accompanied the old man to his house.

There was nothing in the house apart from an old single bed, a gas stove and a table. Not even running water. The police did a full investigation and told us that the old man told the truth.”

Jane felt dizzy and was given some water mixed with sugar and a few basilic leaves. “How am I going to tell my children that their dream of meeting their dad’s siblings is now shattered?”

“Do not worry, Madam. We have a good child psychologist who can be with you when you inform the news to your daughters,” was the reply of the Manager.

“Is it possible to meet the old man? I would like to thank him for giving me Chaand and now Niraj. I would like to help him financially.”

“I am afraid, this is not possible.”

“Why?”

“After Chaand was adopted, Raju, the old man came to enquire about the baby. He wanted so much to see him but it was too late. He was heartbroken and said how much he regretted that he did not keep the baby. He told us that the baby was a godsend as he did not have any child before adding that he was poor but should have kept the baby and brought him like a son of his own. He was devastated. We tried to help him but the pains got hold of him. After two weeks one of our social workers went to see him to find out how he was coping. It was too late. The neighbours told our staff that he died without any family around. The neighbours chipped in and organised a proper funeral for him. They spoke

highly about his kind heart and his despair for not having kept the baby.”

Jane bent her head and in a calm voice said: “Thank you. May be the generosity and goodness of my husband come from this old man. I am so sad I cannot meet him to thank him.”

As it was nearly lunch time, the Manager invited Jane and her children to lunch.

“This is very kind of you. I accept with pleasure but let me give some money to the driver so that he can get himself some lunch.”

“No! Do not worry. There is always enough food for everybody in our Home.”

They all walked to the dining room. With a heavy heart, Jane made a big smile when she saw her daughters playing with the other kids. “They really like it here. They seem to have connected well with the children. I am glad we are staying for lunch; this will give the girls more time to be close with their new friends.”

They all went to wash their hands before sitting down to a vegetarian meal served on banana leaves.

The Manager suggested that the children could have a nap with the other children while she showed Jane around. Jane was impressed with the cleanliness of the dormitories, the toilets and the Home in general.

A miraculous patch of luscious green in the wide garden caught Jane’s eyes while they were walking. Tall and luxuriant tomato plants sat beside thick, purple

aubergines, rows of yellow corn were next to lady's fingers and cucumber, beds of a variety lettuces were talking to each other. A few monkeys were doing gymnastics from one tree to the other while others were dancing the Bharatanatyam with the sound of their own music and the sound of the branches. "This place is magic and so soothing."

The Manager looked at Jane and said: "Women have a key role to manage resources and food production. Unfortunately, trees are being ruthlessly cut down to expand infrastructure while animals in search of shelter and food have to run for their lives. We are doing our best to protect the flora and fauna of our region and hence this big garden. We, women are the custodian of culture and biodiversity. Are we not? It is important for us to inculcate this feeling of love and devotions towards plants and animals to our residents. Apart from the normal vegetables that we plant, we also have bananas, jackfruit, breadfruit, cassava and a wide variety of wild edible food in the form of roots and tubers that we use as staple diet."

"When we cook lunch and dinner, we offer the first two chapattis to animals. One or two residents go up the rooftops to feed the birds. It is only then that we start eating."

Right in the middle of this heavenly garden sat a small temple. Jane was pleased to see the same hand carved statue of Shiva, Parvati with baby Ganesh that she had at home in front of the door of the temple. The roof of the temple was decorated with a variety of colourful deities.

She told the Manager that she would like to visit the temple before going back to the hotel.

"I am learning a lot and feel one day is not enough for me."

In the yard she noticed a few women spreading flowers on a sheet of linen.

The Manager explained that it was the idea of the care workers to collect flowers from temple doors and temple bins. "Very often the flowers are not fresh and are wilted. They sometimes try to revive what they can and make beautiful bouquets. I do not have to tell you how flowers are very important for us. Be it at a wedding, a prayer, a death or any kind of ceremony. The care workers voiced out how it was a shame to see all these beautiful flowers thrown away. I am so happy I gave them permission to collect these flowers. They are now making miracles with the wilted and fresh flowers. They separate the flowers, wash them and let them soak overnight in a big drum. They have their own recipe and techniques to make perfumes and essential oils. The wilted ones are dried in the sun and used to make perfumed dried flowers."

"Is it not difficult to make perfume?"

"I believe so. They are so involved and give so much love to their work that they always succeed. As I said they have their own recipes that I am sure they will be prepared to share with you. If you are interested in staying longer, we can organise a little training on the making of perfumes and essentials oils for you and your daughters. I, myself, have little knowledge in this field. All I know is that they prefer to use roses and

honeysuckle to make perfumes. From your face I can see how eager you are to learn. We can discuss this later.”

“What do you do with all your products?”

“We have a shop and I intend to take you there. At the moment we only sell to visitors although we have great demands from shops on the high streets which know about our products. Tourists like handmade Keralite products. I am sure this would have helped us with our finance but we produce on a very small scale. Shall we go to the shop now?”

“Oh, yes! Let me get Jinny and Jenny. I am sure they will be fascinated and will want to buy gifts for their grandparents and their dad.”

On entering the shop, they were impregnated by the scent of the perfumes mixed with the music of Ricky Kej, “One with Earth” which was followed by Shanti Samsara. Jane was transported into another world and could not resist the temptation of softly singing one of Ricky Kej’s song on Peace. She sang in Sanskrit and her daughters joined her by singing in English:

*Om Dyauh Shaantir Antarikssam*

*Shaantih Prthivii*

*Shaantir Aapah*

*Shaantih Ossadhayah*

*Shaantih Vanaspatayah*

*Shaantir Vishvedevaah*

*Shaantir-Brahma*

*Shaantih Sarvam*

*Shaantih Shaantir-*

*Eva Shaantih Saa Maa*



*Shaantih Edhi*  
*Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih*

*Om, Peace is in Sky*  
*Peace is in Space, between Earth and Sky*  
*Peace is in Earth*  
*Peace is in Water*  
*Peace is in Plants*  
*Peace is in Trees*  
*Peace is in Gods, presiding over the various elements of Nature*  
*Peace is in Brahman, Absolute Consciousness*  
*Peace is pervading everywhere*  
*Peace alone, which is outside, Peace, which is inside*  
*Peace that makes your life fulfilled*  
*Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.*

The Manager and the Shop Manager, Rani, could not believe what they had just heard. "You and your children have melodious voices and you sing like professionals. How come, you and your children know this prayer by heart?"

"It is this place. There is something so special here. Yes, it is a tradition in our family to say this prayer first thing in the morning. There is more to it. This place is transporting me into another world."

"We are great admirers of Ricky Kej. His contribution to the environment through music is incredible. This is not only the right music for the right place but there is more to it that I cannot explain."

Jane and the girls were dazzled and confused. They did not know which shelf to look at first. They were all so well decorated with all the different perfumes and essential oils. Bouquets of dried flowers in little handmade baskets made of twigs hanged from the ceiling. There were petals of fresh flowers thrown on the floor. In a corner stood a large scented candle on a low table. The candle was surrounded by small lighted brass lamps.

“The beauty and the fragrance of your shop is out of this world. This is heaven on earth. I have never seen anything like that in my whole life,” Jane uttered.

All the small bottles of perfumes and essential oils were decorated with ribbons and floral stickers with the name of the flowers used. Jane and the girls chose a wide variety and perfumes and essential oils.

On a teasing note, the shop lady said: “Leave some for other visitors. No, of course, I am joking. But let me tell you that you are making the right choices. Our essential oils are not only made from flowers but bark of trees and plants. We have some with earthy tones like cedar, patchouli and cypress. ”

She went on to explain the benefits and the healing effect of essential oils.

After they had made their choices, the girls asked for permission to go and play with their new friends. With a broad smile, Jane said: “you seem to know the place better than I do. Yes, you can go and play. I want to stay a bit longer in this shop. I am so fascinated by all these

perfumes and essential oils that I want to learn a bit more.”

Rani, the Shop Manager, gave a little phial of essential oil to Jane to smell. Jane took the phial from the Rani’s hand. Instead of smelling the oil, she stared at crochet red bracelet around Rani’s wrist. “This is so beautiful. Did you make it yourself or is it a spiritual totem given to you by a priest?”

“Yes, you can say it is spiritual and religious but not given to me by a priest. I made it myself. This is my totem and I have made an oath that it always remains on my wrist. This is what keeps me going and gives me strength. The love in this bracelet is present in everything that I do including the products that I sell.”

“It looks so familiar to me.”

“Lots of people including young girls offer crochet bracelets to those they love. Our girls here do make them as well. Maybe you have seen one that looked like mine.”

“No! But I have a strong feeling that I saw one exactly the same.”

“This is not possible. You are from Mauritius and I am in Kerala. This can’t be possible.”

Jane racked her brain. She remained quiet for a few minutes. Then tears started to flow on her cheeks. She held the lady close to her and started to kiss her.

"Oh my God! What have I done to deserve this kind of strong and positive affection? Nobody, apart from my aunt Mango, has ever held me so tight."

Mrs Chopra, the Manager, felt there was something that was beyond her control. Jane could not stop crying. "It must be all the emotions you were expressing about this place, Mrs Roy. Rani, please take Mrs Roy to my office. The young lady seems so upset. Talk to her privately to find out why so much sensitivity."

"Yes, Mrs Roy, now that there are only the two of us. Please do tell me what is upsetting you so much. I will see if I can help you. I hope it is not something that we have said or done."

With a sobbing voice, Jane said: "No, you have all been so kind."

"Is it tears of emotions because of the place. You did say that you felt like you were into another world?"

"No, it's your bracelet."

"Oh, my God. How can a bracelet disturb you? Unfortunately, I cannot give you mine but I can make one for you. It does not take long. 30 minutes will be too long. We have all materials needed in our activity room. Or even better I can teach you how to make one."

"No! It's not that. I am sure I have seen one like that in my baby clothes. My mother gave me all my layette set when my girls were born. They were really well kept in white mousseline paper together with this bracelet."

"This is impossible. It is pure coincidence. Maybe your mother made one which looks like mine."

"Can you, please, tell me a bit more about your bracelet?"

"I did it in my hospital bed, heavily pregnant waiting to deliver two babies. I went through the most difficult time of my life. The nurses showed lots of compassion and encouraged me to make three bracelets. They sat with me, taught me and gave me the thread and the crochet."

"What about your parents?"

"My parents? No! I do not have any parents. I belong here and my family is here in this beautiful place."

"I mean..... when you were in hospital. Did your parents not support you or come to visit you."

"Yes, my mother came once. She forced me to sign a consent form that I was giving my babies for adoption."

"Oh, my God. This is horrific. I really cannot believe it."

"The insults from my mum and my dad were too much to bear when I told them I was pregnant. I went to stay with my aunt, Mango, in a remote village. She looked after me like her own daughter. When the neighbours started to gossip, she told them that my husband was still in England and would come to join me."

"Did he come?"

"Who?"

"Your husband."

"No! I never got married. I did a Master's degree in philosophy at the University of Manchester. After the graduation ceremony, all my friends and I went to a party to celebrate. There must have been something in the drink as I was completely drunk and had to be carried to my flat by friends. A week after, I took the plane to return to Kerala. After a few weeks I started to vomit and did not feel well. I thought it was indigestion as my stomach was not used to Keralite food. I went to see the Doctor. After analysing my urine, he did an ultrasound scan. He made a big smile and said, "lucky girl. You must be proud. You are pregnant and expecting twins. Congratulations. I will refer you to a gynaecologist."

"I got a shock and nearly fainted."

"I was still staying with my parents. The situation got from bad to worse when I announced the news to my parents. They said that I could not stay with them as I have brought shame to the family and they did not want any bastard in their house. I decided to go and stay with my aunt Mango. She was such a fantastic person. So, caring with a good heart. She suffered from a cancer but looked after me really well and made sure that I had everything. Unfortunately, she died before the babies were born. I was devastated and did not know where to turn to. I telephoned my parents. My mother said that the consent form was signed. They were prepared to take me back but did not want to have anything to do with the babies."

"I cried my heart out but there was nothing I could do. It was an anonymous adoption. After my daughters were

taken away from me, I went to my parents' place but was treated like the lowest of the low. One day I packed a few things and left. This is the place where I belong. Unfortunately, there is no essential oils that can heal a broken heart."

"Has your mother not tried to contact you?"

"My parents have done a crime by snatching my babies. I do not want to have anything to do with them. I believe they were happy when I left. They have not tried to contact me."

"What a sad story? At least you are happy here," Jane tried to comfort her.

"I will never be happy until I know where my daughters are. I still regret having signed this consent form. To add insult to injury the adoption was anonymous. I will never find my daughters."

"Tell me a bit more about the bracelet."

"As I told you. I did crochet three bracelets and made sure that one will remain on my wrist until I die. I pinned the other two on the babies' onesies."

Jane's heart started to pound like an African drum. She mumbled. She was lost for words. Finally, in a very low voice, she tried to talk. Rani could not understand what she was saying. She repeated herself. There were pauses of hesitations. The sentences were marbled with sounds. She could not express herself properly.

"Are you not well? Shall I get you a glass of juice or water? You are so confused. You look so pale. Shall I call a Doctor?"

Jane did not reply.

"Let me call Mrs Chopra. She might be able to help you."

Mrs Chopra arrived at the spur of the moment. She could not believe her eyes when she saw how pale Jane was. Jane nearly fainted in her arms.

"Oh! My God! I am so sorry. Maybe we did not know how to break the news on your husband."

In a low voice Jane said: "No, it is not you. It is not about my husband. It is about me. I am in total confusion. Can I stay at the Home for a couple of weeks? I feel this is the right place for me at the moment. I will be a paying guest and go according to the rules and regulations of the Home."

"Of course, my dear girl, you are very lucky. At the moment we have a spare room with two single beds and a double bed. You will have to share bathroom and toilet with the other residents," the Manager affectionately said.

In a soft voice Jane thanked her. "This is the first time in my life that I feel so confused and do not know who I am. If you do not mind. I will leave the children here with you so that I can check out at the hotel."



Jane went back to the hotel, telephoned the travel agent to extend her tickets. She telephoned her dad and checked out.

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## CHAPTER 11

### ***UNLOCKING SECRETS***

"Dad, can you please take the first flight to Kerala via Chennai. Please come with mum and Niraj."

"Oh my God! What is the problem? Are you OK? Have my grandchildren been abducted? Please Jane tell me what the trouble is."

"Too complicated to discuss on the telephone dad. We are all fine. But we need you with us. I am emotionally very disturbed."

"Why? Why so much tears in your voice? Have you been able to find Niraj's biological parents? Do they want to see their son? If, yes this is good news. At least this will help Niraj to be more stable. This is good news Jane. Stop crying."

"Sorry dad. I cannot tell you anything on the telephone. I am hurting from inside. I am shattered. My heart is like a broken piece of glass. The girls do not know that I am in so much pain. They have made new friends and have connected so well that I want them to make the most of this place. Jenny and Jinny are learning quite a lot from their new friends. They now know how to plant, how to make soft toy dolls, how to make bouquets. You will see for yourself when you come. But the problem is with me. I am in intense emotional stress and pain."

"OK! It does not matter if Niraj's birth mother does not want to see him. At least you know you have done your best. You and Niraj gave us two beautiful grandchildren."

What more can we ask? I will see with Niraj if he can accompany us and we will take the first flight and come and meet you."

"Hotels are quite full in Kerala. Please book your hotel from Mauritius and once you arrive in Kerala, you can reach me on my telephone."

"Why do I not book the same hotel as you?"

"No! It is a bit complicated. Once you telephone me, I will tell you where to come."

Mr. and Mrs Roy were in turmoil. They called Niraj and told him that most probably Jane had found his biological parents and he had to accompany them to Kerala. Niraj refused saying that his real mother died and he had taken his father out of his life. Krishna Roy insisted and told him that it was a question of life and death as the future of Jane, Jinny and Jenny was at stake. Hearing the names of his daughters, he reluctantly agreed. Krishna Roy booked three first class tickets from Sir Seewoosagar International Airport to Kerala via Chennai. He also booked a double room and a single room at an airport hotel in Chennai and a five-star hotel in Kerala.

As soon as they reached the hotel in Kerala, Krishna telephoned Jane.

"Is Niraj with you?"

"Yes, of course. Since he is the one concerned."

"Come and meet me at the Mother Theresa Children's Home. All papers for Niraj's adoption were done at this place."

"Oh! I am so happy you have been able to find Niraj's roots."

Jane remained quiet and after a few minutes said. "As soon as you reach the place, give me a call so that I can get the door opened for you and ask the Manager for a private room where we can talk."

Mr and Mrs Roy accompanied by their son-in-law were impressed when they entered the Home.

"I am happy that you come from such a beautiful place." Krishna told his son-in-law.

"I only want to see my daughters. This is the first time I have been separated with them for so long," Niraj replied drily.

They were accompanied to a small conference room. The Manager followed by a care worker with a tray of tea and a few Indian delights greeted them with a Namaste.

"Please feel comfortable. My office is next door. I know you have confidential matters to discuss with your family, Jane. I will leave you on your own but if you need me, my office is next door. Feel free to knock on the door. Please also rest assured that Jinny and Jenny are in safe hands and enjoying themselves with their friends."

"Thank you so much Mrs Chopra. We really appreciate what you are doing for us." Jane replied.

The family looked at each other right in the eyes without saying a word. After a few minutes Krishna Roy started to speak.

"If nobody wants to talk, I might just as well start. So, Jane. I guess something was hurting you really bad to leave Mauritius without informing those close to you. Have you gone mad? Travelling to the unknown with two small children. You could at least have informed me about your intention." In a firm voice Krishna Roy added, "I thank you for the mail but I sincerely hope you have been able to find what you were looking for."

"I am not interested to know my roots." Niraj replied. "You should have told me about your decision. This must have been planned. Nobody can decide overnight to travel overseas with two small children. You are irresponsible Jane. Something terrible could have happened to you as well as Jenny and Jinny. This is the most stupid decision I have ever heard of."

"I did that for your good, Niraj. You were such a fantastic person, a great and caring husband. You looked after me and the girls so well. I could not understand why you changed. You became violent not only with your language but with your fists as well. I could not defend myself. The more I tried, the more you became violent. You changed into another person. You took pleasure in beating me."

"Stop! I cannot hear anymore of how my only daughter was subject to violence. She never told me or her dad but we knew when we looked at her. She too changed into another person. From the dynamic girl who was full of life she became a sad person. Please do not say more Jane. We are to blame. We should have put a stop to it when we guessed that you were subject to domestic

violence. My worry now is the girls. I hope this did not happen in front of them." Audrey said.

"No! I can swear that Niraj never touched me in front of the girls. But it was important for me to know how a person can change so much."

"Have you found something? Are you happy now?" Krishna Roy questioned in an angry voice.

"Yes and No"

"What do you mean by yes and no? It is either a YES or a NO!"

Jane then told them about the story of the old man who found a baby but could not keep him due to poverty. "He wanted to keep the baby which also means I would never have met Niraj. He left the baby at the Home. Came to see him regularly until Niraj was adopted by the Boyjoos. The people in this Home are so compassionate. They allowed me to look at Niraj's file in the presence of a psychologist. The Home did lots of research but it was impossible to find the biological mother of Niraj. May be a young girl got pregnant, gave birth all on her own and left the baby under this Neem tree."

"So, you have come to Kerala with my two daughters for nothing? How many times have I told you that the only mother that I have is the one who died from cancer?"

Niraj bent his head and after a few seconds said, "Since we are all together, I would like to apologise profusely for my behaviour. Yes, I felt rejected by my father when I learnt that he has a biological daughter. Yes, I accept I should never have been violent to you. I should never

have threatened or take out all my frustrations on you.....”

With a sob in his voice. “Please Jane, please dad, please mum I ask for your forgiveness. It has been hard for me. I should have talked or go to see a psychologist but instead I threw all my frustrations on Jane. I promise to never raise my hand on Jane again.”

Jane took Niraj’s hand. “That’s ok my darling. The girls and I love you. I knew there was something that you could not handle. Maybe it is my fault as well. We should have talked.”

Niraj hugged Jane and cried uncontrollably on her shoulder. Jane patted him on his back like a small child. “Hush, hush, stop Niraj. I believe you. Nothing is lost.”

Krishna Roy intervened: “I am sure Audrey will agree with me that we should turn the page and start to live as we used to. One big family. We now have two options. Either we book an earlier flight to return to Mauritius or we do some tourism in Kerala. I know it is a fantastic place and is called God’s own land.”

“No dad!”

“What is the problem now?”

“When you asked me if I have found what I was looking for. I said Yes and No. You know the No, let me tell you about the YES now.”

Jane left the room and came back with Rani and Mrs Chopra.

“Mum, dad, Niraj, may I present you Rani.”

They all put their palms together as a sign of respect. Rani replied with a Namaste.

"You have a fantastic daughter. I do not know why but I feel I have known her all my life. We have connected so well. She even helped me in the shop. I have taught her the basics of the preparation of perfumes and essential oils. She is a fast learner," Rani said.

Jane bent her head, with trembling lips and with lots of emotions, she asked Rani to show her bracelet.

Rani showed her bracelet and said that she had told Jane that it was not impossible for her to have the same kind of bracelet. "I am here in Kerala and she is in Mauritius. This is really not possible."

The Roy family as well as Niraj were in shock. Audrey started to mumble and could not find her words. She finally said: "Yes, you have the same bracelet Jane. In fact, I never showed it to you but put it in your layette which I handed over to you when the girls were born."

Crying out at the top of her voice, Jane said: "You have lied to me, to Niraj and my daughters. I always thought you were honest people. We have always lived in transparency and vowed that there would be no secrets between us. Tell me in your own words if I am adopted."

"Krishna Roy in a poised and soft voice tried to explain to Jane, Niraj, Rani and Mrs Chopra why this family secret has never been revealed. "My wife, Audrey, who is British and I lived in Manchester. We got married there. After two years of marriage we could not have any children. We did all treatments that were available and even went



for artificial insemination. Nothing. We decided to take our long overdue honeymoon in India thinking that a holiday might help. We were right. Had it not been for Kerala we would never have got our beautiful daughter Jane. We were guided by our dreams and wanted to return to Mauritius with a baby in our arms.”

“It did not happen like that. We did lots of research and decided to write to the authorities of Kerala. We came across a Central Adoption Authority which was very helpful. Yes, we succeeded. We took an appointment with the Director of the Adoption Authority for more information. We found out that it is a statutory body falling under the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India. A reliable Authority, you will agree, Mrs. Chopra. Adoptions outside India are done according with the provisions of the Hague Convention ratified by the Government of India. A social worker at the agency explained all the process and took us through all the formalities as well as the general preparation before we could have a baby. We even attended counselling sessions. ”

Jane tried to talk. All she could say was “All this remained a secret.....”

Mrs Chopra interrupted, “Yes, you are right Mr. Roy. You cannot go wrong with this Agency. It has a great reputation at national and international level. It deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through recognised adoption agencies. In Kerala it falls under the Directorate of Women and Child Development. I am happy to hear that you went through the right procedures.”

“Thank you, Mrs Chopra. We stayed in Kerala for over two weeks to do all the formalities. We were informed that our baby was given for adoption while the mother was still in her hospital bed. A heart-breaking case indeed. The consent form mentions anonymous adoption. We were longing for a baby while a mother was losing hers. Yes, the baby had the same kind of bracelet around her wrist.

With tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat, Rani could no longer stay quiet. “I gave birth to twins. They were taken away from me as soon as they were born. I did not have the chance to hold them in my arms let alone breast feed them. The nurses were very sympathetic but there was nothing that they could. There was this consent form that I was forced to sign by my mother. The nurses put the bracelets around their wrists. I was torn apart. I was devastated. The colostrum was pouring from my breast. My nipples became hard waiting for the babies to suck but there were no babies.”

“After a few days I took a taxi on my own, returned to my parents’ home. I was treated like the lowest of the low. My parents refused to look at me. I ate on my own in my room. When I went into the living room to watch TV, my parents avoided me like plague and went to their rooms. One day I took my courage in both hands and asked my mother about my babies. Very crudely she told me that she did not want any British bastard in her house and the babies were gone forever. I did quite a lot of research but to no avail. My parents became my worse enemies. My aunt, Mango, with whom I had lived during my pregnancy had passed away. I did not know where to

go. I stayed in an ashram for a few weeks. A lady in the ashram advised me to come here. I am now a member of this big family. I miss my girls a lot and every single night I see them in my dreams. I have built a story book on them with imaginary conversations and drawings. On the date of their birth I do a little puja at the temple which is right here in the garden. I pray to Ganesha to remove all obstacles on their path. I pray to Parvadi to always bless my girls and to give them strength and beauty. I invent stories on their growth, how they play with their friends and even the food they enjoy. They must now be 35 years old, probably married with children of their own."

Jane rushed to Rani, caressed her head. "Please say no more!"

The Roys were in great disturbance and did not know what to say. With an angry voice Jane said: "How disappointing! Knowing that I am adopted after 35 years of existence. I know you are among the most caring and adorable parents but not telling the truth is the worst thing that you could have done to me. This is a crime. I really do not know if I will be able to reconstruct myself. Niraj is better off than me. His parents did not lie to him."

"Stop it now Jane. Do not compare yourself with Niraj." Krishna Roy told his daughter.

Jane turned red with anger. "Yes, but they did not hide anything from Niraj. They even gave him his adoption file and this is how I decided to come here to know the truth on Niraj. It is now the other way around. I am finding the

truth on myself. Niraj will never know about his biological parents but at least he knows he is an.....” Jane fainted before finishing her phrase.

The Manager and Rani asked the family to leave the room. They gave her some sweet water and called the Doctor as well as Deeya, the psychologist.

Krishna, Audrey and Niraj paced the corridor biting their nails for over two hours before they were called inside.

Jane was shaking non-stop. The Doctor rubbed her forehead with some Ayurveda oil. After a few minutes she started to talk in a soft voice. “Why did you hide this truth from me for 35 long years. I know how much you both love me but keeping such a big secret is unforgivable. I now have two children and they do not know anything about my origin.”

“Listen Jane”, interrupted Krishna Roy.

In a strong voice Jane said: “No! I am not going to listen. You listen to me now. We are now talking about my future and the future of my children and my husband.”

“Jane, Jane, Jane. It was an anonymous adoption and it was impossible to know your origins. We insisted to the adoption agency to tell us about your biological parents. They said that legally it was impossible. They were under oath not to reveal anything. Let us talk. We are not even sure if Rani is your biological mother. We can do a DNA test.”

“There is no need for that. I knew right from the start when I set eyes on her that I had something to do with her. I could not take my eyes away from her when I saw

her in that shop. The way she talked. The way she walked. I cannot explain the feeling I got when I hugged her. Deep inside me I know she is my biological mother. Rani show us if you have a birth mark on your calf?"

Rani pulled up her sari and showed her birth mark.

"You see dad. She has the same birth mark that I have. The bracelet and the birth mark are proof enough that Rani is my biological mother. No need for a DNA. This is no coincidence. I came here in this God's own country to find out about Niraj. God helped me to find a treasure. The one who gave life to me. I want to cherish the person who is my birth mother. We have to discuss. If Rani agrees I would like to take her back home with me to Mauritius."

"Jane, beti, please do not blame your parents. It is not their fault if they did not tell you that you were adopted. Although forced by my mother, I signed a consent form for anonymous adoption. My two babies were taken away from me. It is only now after 35 years that I find one of them. You live in Mauritius and I live in Kerala. You found me because of this bracelet. I am starting to believe in miracle. You were always close to my heart although I have never seen you physically. You are such a lucky girl. Your parents have looked after you and your family so well. I know you are a great professional. You have been blessed. I wonder if I would have been able to do the same for you. Now that I have found you, I would so much like to know about my other daughter. My heart is still bleeding. I hope she had the same good fortune as you with such loving parents. Let us hold our hands and say and prayer. This is a time for rejoicing."

The family closed their eyes to thank the Lord for the miracle that was happening to them. They did a prayer asking for forgiveness and a better future.

While they were in meditation, Madvi Chopra went to the puja altar, in the corner of the room, to light some incense sticks. After a few minutes she returned to the group with a tray with the ash from the incense. She put a dot with the ash on the forehead on each one of them. They all closed their eyes and put their palms together. Krishna and Audrey Roy touched her feet.

Krishna held Jane and Rani in his arms and said: "My wife, my son and myself came here to find the origins of my son, Niraj. I never thought in my wildest dream that one day I will be faced with this kind of dilemma of unlocking family secrets. In the name of my wife, Audrey and my own name, I would like to apologise profusely for having kept this secret for 35 years. We sincerely regret Jane that we never told you that you were adopted. I never thought that one day what has been buried will come out to the surface. Reality is hitting me like a vengeance. We never told you Jane as we thought it would be impossible for you and for us to find your birth mother. Even Rani did not know where her babies went. I am relieved Jane. Keeping this secret has been exhausting, it has been painful for both your mother, I mean Audrey and me. We concealed your adoption to the detriment of our own health. Very often, we did not sleep at night and had nightmares. I now solemnly promise that I will do everything I possibly can to find out about your other daughter, Rani. Jane, I promise that I will do my best so that you can find your sister. I

have the address of the adoption agency. I can find out with them who adopted the second baby. If there is need to take a lawyer, I will take the best one in India. The taxi is still waiting outside but before I go, I would like to see my granddaughters.”

Rani went to get Jinny and Jenny. The girls could not believe their eyes when they saw their dad and their grandparents. They hugged each other and the whole family started to shed tears of joy. An intense emotion took hold of Rani’s throat with impetuous tears. Jane invited Rani to join in the hugging and kissing of the family. Jane wiped Rani’s tears with her hands and hugged her tight.

“Let me come with you dad. The officers at the adoption agency might have more sympathy if they see me and if we tell them that they did the administrative procedures for my adoption.”

“No! this is too hard Jane. I cannot bear to see you suffer more than you have. Our emotions are at its peak. Why don’t you stay with Niraj, Srimati Rani and the children? Audrey can accompany me. This might be even better as the first time we went there, there were just Audrey and me.”

“No Sir, I will come with you and Mrs Roy. It is important for the adoption agency to know that I have found my daughter and I will implore them to help me find my other daughter.”

“Please Srimati Rani, do not call me Sir. I would rather you call me bhaya. Coming with us is a great idea.”

The officers at the adoption agency were very sympathetic. The Officer in Charge agreed to ask one of his staff to do a search in the adoption files of 35 years back. Mr and Mrs Roy and Rani waited for over 45 minutes and were served tea meanwhile. The staff came back with a large file. The Officer in Charge went through the file. "This is highly confidential and my job is at stake for giving top secret information. I sympathise a lot with you Srimati. You must have gone through hell not knowing where your babies were. This is the first time in the history of our agency that we have to deal with such a delicate matter. The adoption was anonymous and now we have the birth mother standing in front of us after 35 years. I am prepared to meet halfway. This exceptional case demands an exceptional approach, the more so that the adoptive parents of one of your daughters come from such a long distance. All I can tell you is that both twins came to us. We did our best not to separate them but the first couple who came wanted to take only one baby. Maybe it is God's will that both babies have Mauritian parents."

With lots of gratitude and a namaste, they all left the agency.

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## CHAPTER 12

### ***IN SEARCH OF THE LOST GIRL***

There was no need for Krishna and Audrey Roy to remain in India longer. They preferred to go back to Mauritius to start their search of the lost girl. "If you, Niraj and the girls want to stay longer, please do. You can also get to know your birth mother better, Jane. I have lots of friends in the media and I will find out how best we can investigate to find your sister. I know it will be like trying to find a needle in a haystack but I will do my best. After what happened today, who knows? May be God is guiding us."

Jane hugged her dad and her mum. "You are the best parents in the whole world. Please stay with us for a couple of days so that we can talk to Jinny and Jenny together with Niraj and Rani. The girls know that their dad was adopted. They also know that Niraj's dad has a daughter with his second wife and has even asked to see her. They are too young to deal with such complicated issues. If we are all together in the company of Rani, this might make things less complicated."

They discussed the matter with the Manager who not only thought it was a good idea but said she was even prepared to ask Deeya, the psychologist of the shelter to help them if need be. Mrs Chopra told them she regretted very much that her policy for the time being did not allow her to take male adults and they would have to find a hotel. She even suggested a few good

hotels in the surroundings. She did not have any objection to give Rani a few days leave to connect with her lost family.

The family explained everything in details to the twins before presenting Rani as another member of the family.

Krishna Roy wanted some assurance from Mrs Chopra for Rani to live in Mauritius if the whole situation turned out to be positive. "I will, of course, meet all the expenses and she will stay with us."

Krishna Roy thanked Mrs Chopra profusely. "We would never have seen the light without your help and support. The light that shines in your shelter is shining in our hearts and we will go back home with a joyful heart. Jane has now two mothers and the girls two grandmothers." Krishna bent down to touch the feet of Mrs Chopra.

The whole family, one by one, including Jinny and Jenny bent down to touch the feet of Mrs Chopra.

Jenny and Jinny cried while saying goodbye to their friends and promised to write to them.

A proud Niraj held his wife and his two daughters tight, looked at Krishna and Audrey and said "I owe you an apology for all my bad behaviour and promise that we will be the happy family that we always were before I started with all my gallivanting."

Krishna smiled at his son-in-law and said: "We must thank you Niraj. Look where your bad behaviour has brought us. Let us now look at the positive side of things."

They all stayed in the same hotel and talked all night long. When everything was clear in their minds and the girls were happy, Audrey called Rani to ask her to spend the day with them.

"Girls, here is your other grandma. Are you not lucky to have two grandmas? You would have had three if your dad's mum was still alive."

Jenny and Jinny hugged Rani. "Oh! Nani Rani we love you. Why don't you come to Mauritius and live with us? My grandparents have a huge house, so do we. You will have your own room. Please Nani, please Nani, say yes!"

"Thank you so much, my sweeties. Let us take one step at a time so that we do not fall. Once your granddad has succeeded in his research, I will definitely come to Mauritius and who knows? I might even decide to stay for good."

"Bahanji, we discussed a lot and could not sleep. We have plans for you in Mauritius. Even if we cannot find your other daughter at least you know you have Jane and your granddaughters. We are your only family. We do not want to lose you." Krishna then gave Rani all the details on Roy for Joy which was run by Rahul. "My lost and found childhood friend, Rahul, went through the most tragic pains. He lost his only daughter who was raped after school. His heartbroken parents could not bear this loss and passed away soon after. His wife could not get over the grief of losing their daughter. She committed suicide."

Rani could not believe her ears. "This is a horrific story. Mine is nothing compared to Rahul's."

"You are lucky Bahanji. You have found at least one daughter. Rahul's family have all gone forever. We are his only family. Jane has two fathers, Rahul and myself. Now she has two mothers, you and Audrey. We are a big family and let us do our utmost to keep this family as tight as possible. Let us promise ourselves that we will not lose sight of each other. Furthermore, we badly need somebody like you at Roy for Joy to assist Rahul. Who knows maybe you can start a perfume shop there? I know this is a dream. But we all need dreams to make things happen. Let us make this dream come true Bahanji."

On the suggestion of Audrey and Krishna, Jane and Niraj stayed in Kerala with the girls for a holiday. "We have not had a holiday just the four of us for so long. This is a great idea." Niraj replied hugging Jane and the girls. "The girls will be close to their Nani and can even meet their friends at the shelter before we leave for Mauritius."

Jane telephoned Kiran, the driver, to ask him to organise a holiday for them in the best places of Kerala. After dropping Audrey and Krishna to the airport, Kiran met Jane and family at the hotel and suggested Athirampally, Munnar, Thekkady, Alleppy followed by a Kathakali dance to end up the holiday in apotheosis. With all luggage and bags packed Kiran took them to 5-star hotels in the different places where they visited the most amazing places on earth with breath-taking sceneries. The girls were so proud when they were invited to take pictures with the Kathakali artists.

Whenever they were close to Mother Theresa Home, they had dinner with Rani.

Krishna sent WhatsApp messages to Jane to keep her posted on the search. Jane made it a point to forward the messages to Rani.

After Jane and her family returned to Mauritius, Jane decided to go on air about her lost sister. This was the worse decision that she ever took in her life. The media started to write articles from a sensational point of view without even contacting her. Journalists stood in front of her gate and that of her parents to take pictures. When one newspaper put the pictures of Jenny and Jinny on the front page with the title: "Twins in search of their aunt", the Roy contacted their lawyer to sue the newspapers. The journalist and the newspapers officially apologised for not having asked for the consent of the parents to use the pictures of the twins. But it was a bit late as the harm had already been done. The girls had to stay at home for some time waiting for the whole story to calm down before going back to school.

After two whole months of climbing mountains in search of the lost girl, the mountains were getting taller and taller.

The Roy was on the point of giving up when one-night Krishna dreamt of the girl who went through multiple rape. He started to talk in his dream and was sweating. Audrey shook him, went to the bathroom and came back with a towel to sponge him. "What is the problem Krishna? Please talk to me. I have never seen you in such a state."

Krishna nodded bemused, unable to speak. After a few minutes after having drunk some cold water, he got his

voice back. "You remember the girl near river who was subject to multiple rape? I believe her name was Janice. We thought she was Jane when we saw her from a distance."

"So!"

"I would like to talk to her."

"Where will this lead us to Krishna? We have tried everything. All our friends have done their best to help us. We have gone on air. There have been lots of articles on our family. You even had to sue a newspaper. This will lead us to nowhere."

"We can always go and see her and see if she is well settled with her children at the shelter. You remember I made arrangements for her and her kids to go the shelter. I promised to help her finding a job. I have not been able to keep my promise with all our turmoil. Why is she haunting me in my dream?"

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## CHAPTER 13

### ***LOST AND FOUND***

Early next morning instead of going to work, Krishna went to the shelter and asked the Manager if he could have a conversation with Janice.

Janice trembled with fear thinking that she would be thrown out of the shelter. "Where will I go with my three children? Please have pity on me."

"Who told you that you will be on the streets? Mr. Roy has not even talked to you. Wipe your tears and come with me," the Manager told Janice.

She still remembered Mr Roy. She was shaking like mad. Before Krishna could say a few words, she started to talk. "I am sorry Sir. I sincerely apologise I have not started work yet. I had to stay with my children. It is only last week that my children got admitted to a school. The Manager has been good and caring. I help with household chores. I am good at cooking and the Manager has done some marketing for me. I have quite a few orders to do samosas, chapatis and curries. The Manager is taking good care of us. We have a room all to ourselves. I know you are the patron of the shelter. I beg you Sir, I implore you, not to throw us out. I would not know where to go. My adopted mother will not take me back since I will not be able to give her any money."

Janice started to sob. In a deep but soft voice, Krishna said: "Who is asking you to go? Did I use this word? Did the Manager say that you must take your children and go?"

She bent her head and said "No".

"So, where is the problem?"

"I do not know. I have not heard from you since my accident. The police came a few times. I even did a confrontation with my rapists. I had to go to court and thank God my rapists are now in prison. I thought you did not want to have anything to do with a raped girl."

Krishna explained what he went through and how her daughter Jane came to know she was adopted.

"She is like me then. I know I was adopted in Kerala. But she is lucky to have a father like you. I saw in what state you were not being able to find your daughter on that fatal evening near the river. In my case I do not know if I was adopted or trafficked to become a maid and to bring money in the house of my adopted parents. I started to work in my parent's house at the age of nine and when I turned 10, they sent me to work in people's homes. I was allowed to go out only once a week and during one of these days I met a nice chap that I thought I could spend the rest of my life with. I eloped to live with him. Unfortunately, it turned out that he was a drug dealer. When he did not get his drug, he became violent and starting beating and kicking me and the children. I had nowhere to go and had to return to my adopted parents. They had an upper hand on me. I was filled with dark thoughts. I was frustrated and powerless but stayed because of my children. I worked in people's home and at the end of the month had to give them all the money."

"Listen, Janice. When we met my daughter's birth mother in Kerala, she told us that she gave birth to twins. The



agency did what they were supposed not to do. They told us that they indeed received twins that were given to them for adoption. They went through their files and said that the other twin was adopted by Mauritian parents. We have done everything we possibly could to get hold of these parents. We went on air, there were articles in the media, friends helped us by contacting adoption agencies in Mauritius but we did not succeed.”

“I do not listen to the radio and I do not know how to read. I sympathise with you but I really do not know how a poor girl like me can help you?”

“You can Janice. When I saw you crying near this river after you went through multiple rape, I thought you were my daughter Jane. From the back you looked so much like her. In all our traumas I did not look at you properly. Now I can see the resemblance. You have the same skin colour.”

“This is really not possible, Sir.”

Krishna then called the Manager to ask her for permission to take Janice home with him.

“But, Sir. Her children are at school. They will look for their mother when they come back.”

“OK, then. Just give me a time when the children are back. I will come for Janice and her kids. Is it OK for you Madam? Is it OK for you Janice to come to my place? I promise all this is being done in good faith. We do not want to harm you. On the contrary we want to help you.”

Krishna went back home and talked to his family. Jane advised her dad to take her bracelet to show to Janice.

"Rani did say that she made three bracelets. The only way to find out is to see if the third bracelet is with Janice."

"No! Leave it Jane. When she comes, we will show her the bracelet."

Janice and her children got the shock of their lives when they saw the mansion of the Roy. The whole family including Niraj, Jenny and Jinny were waiting for them at the doorstep.

The eyes of the children became wide open when they were served with lollies. They hesitated until their mother told them they could help themselves. It did not take them long to make friends with Jenny and Jinny who took them to the garden to play hide and seek.

Jane looked at Janice in the eyes. Fears and tears furrowed Jane's face. "I had the same feeling the first time I met Rani. My body is talking to me dad. She is my sister. We have the same complexion of Anglo-Indian girls." She hugged Janice, kissed her profusely and cried on her shoulders. "I did not know I have a sister until recently. I cannot explain my joy. I promise that we will always remain together as one family."

Janice was baffled. She could not find her words.

".....I am sorry. I do not know what you are talking about."

"Janice, you are my sister. Can't you see we have the same complexion. Look at my bracelet. Do you have one like that?"

Janice was totally bewildered. "Yes, I do have one and my adopted parents told me that they made it for me as a sign of love. In fact, instead of love they abused me and made me work day and night as well as working in other people's houses. When I could not bear it anymore, I ran away with very little things but took the bracelet with me. I do not know why I took it, ... a bracelet with bad souvenirs of my adopted parents."

Audrey interfered "This bracelet is a sign of love and will light your way. Just think of it, why did you take this among the few things you decided to take? This is a sign."

In a firm but caring voice Krishna said, "Janice, from now on you and your children will stay with us until I make other arrangements for a permanent house for you. Meanwhile I will take you to the shelter. I will talk to the manager. You will pack your bags and that of the children and come back with me. You can leave the children with Jane." He laughed before adding, "She is the aunt after all."

Janice had the bracelet around her wrist when she returned to the mansion with Krishna.

The outer house was organised for them and a beautiful meal prepared by Audrey with the help of her maid.

Jane helped Janice and the children to settle in the house before dinner. Jane got a shock when Janice opened the bags and started to take her things out. She felt dizzy and had to sit on the bed.

“What’s the problem. Why are you so pale?” Janice enquired.

“I have been living in luxury and I cannot believe that my own sister has gone through traumatic experiences and with only rags to put on her back and that of her children. Please, Janice do not wear these old clothes. My niece and nephews will not wear clothes that have been passed on from children to children. I will get Niraj to come with me and we will get you and the children new clothes. Meanwhile have your shower, give the children their bath and use these big towels to wrap yourselves until we come back.”

After a good dinner while still at table, Krishna told Janice that he had been giving a good thought about her future. “This is what I suggest. We have enough land near Roy for Joy, a residential home for the elderly. I will have a little chalet built near the home for you, the children and Rani if she comes. Meanwhile you can stay with us. Rahul will help finding a school for the children and will also teach you some Creole, English and French. I am sure you are as intelligent as Rani and Jane but did not get the chance. I have no doubt that you will be a fast learner. You are still young; you might even consider sitting privately for examinations in the subjects that you will feel at ease with.”

With these words, Krishna left the table and came back after less than one hour. “I have good news for you all. Rani will be with us in a week.”

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