



THE RAIVARDHANS - BOOK I

IT STARTED
WITH AN
IMPULSE

VICTORIA

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THE RAIVARDHANS BOOK I**

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NOTE

Victoria is the pen name used by the author Sarah F.

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“A person often meets his destiny
on the road he took to avoid it.”

- *Jean de La Fontaine*

Trigger Warning:

The following story contains profanities, disturbing and violent thoughts
and scenes.

Reader discretion is advised.

PREFACE

The darkness swallowed me when my eyelids slowly raised. The warm and sticky air started to suffocate me already. My breathing had slowly morphed into ragged. Panic flooded my system. What scared me more was the realization that I couldn't react. I couldn't even lift a finger, let alone move my body. I didn't know why my body felt numb and heavy while my head was dizzy. My vision blurred on the edges making me so badly want to throw up.

A lone tear slipped from the corner of my eye before they were shut close again on their own accord. The slumber overpowered my will.

A little more sleep couldn't be so harmful, right?

That was where I had been wrong. When I next opened my eyes, I was lying on an unfamiliar bed and when I tried to move, I still couldn't. My brain started to focus on the surroundings rather than the emotions that were threatening to burst out of me. My habitual panic after waking up in new places alone, threatened to take over me.

By some miracle I hadn't already gone into a frenzy of palpitations and trepidation. Perhaps it was the drug that they had given me that kept me calmer than usual. Yet, it wasn't enough.

I still couldn't feel even my fingertips, it was so numb and that was the reason that I started to freak out. The drugs might have been wearing off because the new surroundings had started to give me palpitations. The only thing I wanted to do was get back home, I wanted to go home to my family so badly.

I was scared. In fact, I was terrified.

The movement on my right caught my attention, my vision still blurred from the drowsiness but the silhouette looked oddly familiar. My brain kept chanting like a mantra, *'be brave, do not under any circumstances let the other party know how badly he was affecting me'* but my facade of bravado couldn't stop tears from escaping.

My tongue rolled around with difficulty, slurring my words, "W-Who... are... you?"

Only to hear the words that chilled my spine. Or rather it was the familiar voice and the creepy tone.

"Oh my darling, I have waited for such a long time to have you. But now, now you are exactly where I want you to be."

1. EK

What is an Impulse? Some say it is a tiny, annoying feeling that grabs hold of your scruff and pulls you down till it gets what it wants. Some others say that it is what you want so badly that you don't feel okay till it's done.

And the dictionary has a whole block of definitions dedicated just for it.

But you know what? For me, an impulse became the key to change my whole life, my entire system of beliefs, and perhaps even my already doomed fate.

It saved my ass from being stuck next to a man almost double my age and it also gave me a whole new drama, which I complained about all the time. Until I realized that it was quite the contrary.

It wasn't something that I should be nagging about, instead it was something that I had to cherish till the end of my existence; till I laid cold, six feet under.

My name is Rynah Raivardhan and this is my story. And every good story needs a beginning.

And, mine? It started with an impulse.

Starting from the very beginning, right when my days were numbered. Well, by days being numbered I meant my long awaited vacations that were finally coming to an end before the start of my new job. At that time, I neither had the surname Raivardhan attached to me nor had I ever even expected to end up having it as my surname. It was just plain, old Kundra, Rynah Kundra. I

know, it sounded calm and boring. Well, it didn't matter at that time but what mattered more was my little leftover break before the office load started for me, the time where I would work like an '*actual*' adult. The cherry on the top was the fact that I got a good enough post and not the usual desk worker job right at the beginning. After all, I had just graduated from IIT Hyderabad.

Before I continue with anything else, I *need* to inform you that I was weird. My brain was hardwired with a few screws or even the wires missing. It sometimes took my mind more than a mere second to function, rendering me to end up looking very stupid when that indeed wasn't the case. After all, I had enough IQ to work my way into an IIT, let me not get into details about how I managed to enter one of the most prestigious institutes in the country. It's altogether another story after getting into the IIT. So, in short, I was pretty intelligent, for me and my family's standards at least. And of course, even according to some of the recruiters who deemed me worthy.

Before my new phase of life started, I wanted to enjoy my time carefreely with my favorite cousins.

My head was partially out of the window, watching the posh mansions, standing tall and mighty over their fancy compounds, move passed slowly due to the speed that we were traveling at. I bet even a snail could overtake us at this speed.

The car literally, I meant *literally* moved at ten miles per hour, putting my non-existing patience to test. And I think I recognized the house from around the corner. How wouldn't I when I had seen the same house three times by now as we had already gone past it just a few minutes ago?

Beside me, my baby sister, Ritika Kundra gaped at the driver incredulously, definitely wanting to choke him with her bare hands. While our mother, Niharika Kundra, stared at him, actually glared at him with her hands folded across her chest.

And of course, the driver perspired like a swine caught in a metal barrel under the sun, on a hot summer day. Gosh, it was indeed a hot day here. Mind my words, when I say hot, it is Hyderabadi hot.

He gulped as he looked at us through the rear view mirror from the corner of his eyes, then pretended to look around before looking back at us, like a great actor he was.

"Madum-ji, I not know. My Jee-Pee-Azz not showing what showing..." He informed us while wiping the drop of sweat that had rolled down from the side of his forehead with the back of his hand. His nervous tone and that peculiar English of his where he massacred the grammar, made the situation even more hilarious than it should have been, but I couldn't burst out laughing, not if I wanted to live. My mother had started to show the signs of her annoyance, and my irritated mom wasn't someone you would want to mess with. Until you would want to hang yourself that is for ever starting it.

Was this the reason why the car speed had dropped to a snail's pace because he didn't know where to go? Was it why he drove us in circles again and again because we were lost in the city? Or had he thought that we would believe him when he said something like that?

He was definitely bluffing because I could see that the GPS was still working fine and this guy must have pressed something to escape the path navigation.

He looked like he wanted to continue as he opened his mouth but shut it immediately when my mom gave him a nasty glare.

"Do we look like we have come from Madagascar?" My mother smiled sickly sweetly. The sudden change in her expression stopped my heart.

Oh no! Not the sweet monster mom! She would smile sweetly before chewing nastily.

"Madhe-gaz-kar? Oh, where that, Madum-ji?" The driver looked at us with those big eyes. I swear, I could see the cash symbol flashing in them.

"Abroad," my sister beat my mother by replying, "Do you think that we have come from abroad so that you can make a fool out of us?"

There, my sister swooped in with a beat. Guess, my sister wasn't feeling less annoyed than my mother at the moment as she grumbled glaring at him, "I swear, I smelt the swindler air from him right when we got into the taxi. He thinks three ladies would not be able to do anything against his gimmicks?"

The driver blinked while opening and closing his mouth some three consecutive times, and ended up looking like a dying fish. Perhaps my sister's better English was harder for him to process.

"Kya samajh kar aaye the? Sardar bahot khush hoga? Shabashi dega? Kyoon?" I leaned forward mimicking the dialogue from the famous movie of the twentieth century just to add more entertainment to the live show. That made the driver gulp loudly, at last grasping the situation.

Oh yeah, he was finally understanding in which waters he was standing.

"M-madum-ji-" And he wasn't allowed to defend himself too...

"Mister, hum yahan Hyderabad main paley bade hain. Yeh jo ganda sa khel tum khel rahe ho, yeh sab pata hai, so you better drop us where we were supposed to be dropped without creating any more drama, unless you want us to complain about you to the company. I will share all the details about you and your taxi to my friend circle saying how you take advantage of the three lonely women and rob them of the money," my sister opened her big mouth interrupting him.

And voila! Here we go with the Oscar award winning best acting skills goes to Ritika Kundra! The driver was out of the race with just that little speech

alone.

Now coming to her confident claim of being born and brought up in Hyderabad. Well, no, not really. We were in fact born and raised in Delhi but shifted to Hyderabad due to my studies. My parents were one of those over-protective types you see... They rather shift their entire lives to an environment they weren't familiar with rather than let me go and live in the hostel alone.

The driver opened his mouth to protest, but Ritika snapped again not letting him speak, "And we aren't paying you even an extra [paisa](#)," she quickly added, leaving the poor guy dumbstruck.

As if realising that no matter what he was going to say, it would only bring in more trouble for him, the driver shut his mouth, turned to face front and started to drive again. At least this time it wasn't at ten miles per hour.

After three more minutes, he stopped the car before a medium-sized three-story mansion, beside an empty plot. There weren't any lofty compounds like the other mansions around this one. And most of the left side of the mansion had been made up of window walls. The frontal white wall had a creeper climbing over its side.

It was of modern contemporary style, and also the 'almost newest house' in Jubilee Hills. Jubilee Hills, one of the luxurious localities in West Hyderabad, and to live here was like living like royalty.

I climbed down the car and gawked at the structure before me admiringly. I was in awe, and I couldn't care less that my appreciation of the beautiful structure would be taken as something else. Stretching my aching arms up in the air from sitting in that damned car for so long, I couldn't help but let out an unladylike yawn.

It was just recently that my aunt had bought this house and moved in. My

aunt, Lasika Batra was the sweetest woman out there and her husband, Aadarsh Batra, had a startup that had shortly started to gain recognition.

"But madum-ji! It not fair!" The driver's voice interrupted my chain of thoughts. I saw my mom placing a few hundred bucks on the passenger seat stating, "That is how much it would have cost us if you hadn't intended for your money-making scheme."

"But madum-" my sister stopped him in the middle, "If you argue more, I will take a hundred away and call your manager complaining about you. It's not like we have never traveled before, and other drivers are actually sweet and honest, unlike you."

On hearing that his fare was going to be reduced by half, the driver immediately picked the money, ignited the car and drove away, like a lion was chasing after him.

Ask my family to threaten anyone, and no one could beat them at it.

"Niharika! My darling sister!" Aunt Lasika's voice grabbed our attention. She was already pelting down our way. And my mom dropped her handbags on the ground before hugging her little sister chuckling loudly.

"Lasika! I am so glad that you are finally here!" My mom almost squealed the latter half of her statement. My aunt and her family had decided to move to this city many years after us. She was desperately in need of a change after the stress they had been through when Uncle Aadarsh had lost his job, and my mom suggested that Hyderabad was a really good place to start over. After a long time of convincing, they had finally agreed to give it a try.

The sisters continued to chat as I busied myself to look around the area. It wasn't frequent for commoners like us to roam around these posh streets. The houses were all very pretty. Except for the structure across the main road by the empty plot which happened to be beside my aunt's house.

High compounds surrounded the structure almost till the second floor, swallowing the entire first and ground floor behind it. Above the wall was the beautiful lush green trailing rosemary that decorated it exotically, by spilling from the top of it. Apart from the wall was a watchman's station made halfway up of glass walls. And three sturdy looking guards sat inside, I don't know why but one of them cast a mean glare in my direction as if I had asked him to surrender his position to me.

A shiver ran down my spine, for I would never want to ever get in trouble with those overly healthy looking folks. Ignoring him, I discreetly observed the remaining structure, there was nothing much remaining there except for the gates which were two in count. On one side, there were huge double gates that even a truck could get in and on another side was a single gate for people to go in and out. Both the gates were tall, almost competing with the compound walls for the height.

"Rynah! My dearest!" Lasika aunty's voice was faster at grabbing my attention before she engulfed me in a bear hug.

"Aunty! It's been such a long time since I had last seen you," I greeted her back while being glad when she withdrew from her suffocating hug.

"You are still such a pretty lass! It pains my heart when nobody sees that you are beautiful inside and out. I pray for you to get better proposals apart from that pedophile..." aunt trailed off staring in the distance with sadness lurking in her eyes. I felt my eyes find the ground in agreement. It must have been my fate or something in my stars that all the proposals I ever received were always way too low graded for my family standards. Except for Surya Kanth Nath, a man in his late forties, who happened to be well off compared to others, none of the others even had decent jobs to begin with while I was an IIT graduate. Maybe I had managed to barely pass my engineering with average scores but still it was an IIT for crying out loud! The majority of the guys weren't anywhere near as qualified as me, yet there they were,

shamelessly asking for my hand in marriage.

That was the only reason why my parents kept the proposal of the only eligible man on hold, wishing their daughter would get better proposals than an old man, nevertheless he had already gained the title of being called *my unofficial-fiancé*. I might have not been the most beautiful girl out there, but I wasn't very ugly either... My long wavy black hair complemented my spotless fair skin. My lips were big but my eyes were bigger. My long slender nose was envied by many. So were my high cheekbones on my long face. I was taller than the the average Indian women and my physique wasn't something that I would be worried about. But none of it attracted any other proper suitors for me. It took such a small topic to make the atmosphere gloomy.

"Are we even getting invited inside? Or are you planning to send us back from here? I don't even see the shadow of the taxi from where I am standing," my mom teased, changing the topic and eventually making the mood lighter again, aunt Lasika laughed before ushering us in.

Well, it had been a tiring day and a hilarious start. All I could hope was that it would continue to be the same. Who knew when fate felt like playing with us, right? Like it did with me.

2. DO

"Hey, hey! Look who's here? My Little aunty!" Aunt Lasika's eldest son, Luv, who so happened to be my tormentor for as long as I could remember, grabbed hold of me in a headlock and ruffled my hair. He was seven years older than me and already had a fiancée but still didn't stop annoying the life out of me! And even now, he was teasing me indirectly by referring to my *so-called-unofficial-fiancee*, Surya Kanth Nath...

"Hey! Keep your filthy hands away from me. And NOT MY HAIR! You don't deserve Shanti, at all!" I pushed his hands away and gave him a nasty glare.

"Why?" He just raised his eyebrows.

"Because she's such a sweet girl, and soft-spoken and full of etiquettes. While you," I paused there, especially emphasizing on 'you' like it's an insult before

continuing, not before looking at him from head to toe, "You are the first caveman who unfortunately found a time machine and ended up in this era. So barbaric and one hell of a jerk."

I shook my head dramatically with a heavy sigh.

Luv just looked at me, amused before he burst out laughing. And of course, ruffling my hair some more.

"Hey! Which part of 'not my hair' did you not understand?" I pushed his hands away for the second time.

"Kiddo, if you think I am a caveman, barbaric and a jerk, wait till fate hits you with the real barbaric, caveman and a jerk in your life," Luv mused before slightly ruffling my hair again, just to get on my nerves. Then he walked away from me and towards his next victim, whistling, with an aim to torture Ritika.

"Gosh! Will you stop whistling over there? It's so damn irritating!" There you go Luv, mission accomplished! Now those two would bicker over nothing for hours together!

"Rynah!" I was pulled into a hug even before I could turn. At least, I was grateful that it wasn't the second brother Kush, who happened to be as bad as Luv. Actually, even worse than Luv...

"Anjali!" I greeted the fourth and the last child of aunt Lasika, who was around my age. It must have been the similarity in ages that Anjali and I were usually attached at hip whenever and wherever we find each other.

"I thought that you were never going to meet me before you got married!" I groaned at her words.

"Not you too, Anju!"

Not a few feet away, we could hear Luv snickering making me give him an annoyed look.

"Chuck him! Come, I'll show you your bedroom!" Anjali grabbed my hand before dragging me all the way to the second floor.

"Any news about Tapasya?" I inquired about half way jogging after her.

"Nah, it looks like their honeymoon period isn't over yet. She hardly replies to any messages." Anjali shrugged nonchalantly.

The third child of aunt Lasika was another daughter named Tapasya, who recently got married to a guy working in Google. Her husband, Rajiv Agarwal was a real catch according to everyone, though he was quite average looking when compared to Tapasya. It wasn't really easy for the eyes according to me but whom am I to judge if they are happy?

Everyone was happy with how she ended up marrying him. She often got told to have the best fate in the entire family in the aspects of marriage, by who ever heard about her spouse!

A small part of me slightly envied her, I mean, who wouldn't when she's having the time of her life while I am not even getting a decent proposal. Nonetheless, I was genuinely very happy for her, after all, she was my cousin. Smiling slightly at the memories of her extravagant wedding, I looked at Anjali who was standing before a closed blue door and shifted her weight on her feet impatiently.

"You know, I am tempted to tie you up on a cheetah?" Anjali commented, making me stick my tongue out at her. Laughing at her rolling her eyes, I turned the knob before walking into the room.

"Real mature, Rynah. Real mature," I just grinned widely at her words as I flopped down on the bed. I had no doubt that she would have shaken her

head, though I couldn't see.

The room was pretty, with a queen-sized bed, a white love couch kept against the glass wall, wardrobes, and an en-suite bathroom. The room was entirely white, except for the wall opposite the bed, which was gray. The doors were Navy blue and the wall to the right of the bed was entirely made up of glass.

How lovely! I had a room with a window wall!

"Thank you for the pretty room, Aunt Lasika," I sighed in delight, taking in all the decors around the room.

"You should be thanking me because I was the one who chose this room for you," she winked at me.

I rolled my eyes playfully but I did thank her for her thoughtfulness.

"Oh my god! I have something to show you!!" All of a sudden she was engulfed by sudden burst of excitement as she remembered something! She almost skipped her way to the love couch and looked out of the glass wall.

What was she staring at?

The curiosity got the better of me and the next thing I knew, I was kneeling on the couch beside her, peering out of the glass wall.

"Whatcha looking at?" My voice came out in a sing-song tone as I looked at her. It reminded me of Isabella from Phineas and Ferb, saying 'Whatcha doing?'

The number of times Ritika had seen that cartoon, I was not surprised that I had indeed used the tone of a cartoon character.

"Look at that mansion," she nodded at the mansion that was on the other side of the road and across the empty site. The one that I found beautiful just by

seeing the high compounds. But now, I could see more of it.

Behind the compound, I could see a hanging garden and polarized window walls on the same floor as ours. The levels above were higher up, so only glass walls and exterior wooden design was visible. The infrastructure was just so beautiful to look at, that I had been gaping at the exteriors of the house alone.

"Wait till you see the residents," she wriggled her eyebrows at me.

"Are they that good?" I wondered out loud. My brows pulled together.

"Good?" She asked exaggeratedly, "They are the definition of perfect male species! They are The Raivardhans, after all!"

The 'duh' in her tone made me feel like an idiot. I agree that I never paid much attention to the news or my surroundings, but was I so ignorant that I was oblivious to the entire society that I lived in? Okay, maybe I was. After all, I had to pass the engineering exams every six months. I had been so engrossed in my studies that I was very much deprived of entertainment for four years straight. My only source of news in the entertainment department had either been Anjali or Perna. Perna, my best friend from university, always nagged about how my knowledge was so limited to whatever was happening in the world around me. And truth to be told, I only knew what they had shared with me.

"Who?" I couldn't help but frown. It was the first time that I had heard that name.

"The Raivardhans? You don't know the Raivardhans!?! " She exclaimed as if I was just released from jail after serving time for a severe crime!

I hesitantly shook my head, afraid that she would throw me out of the window wall for the answer.

What? I wasn't exaggerating! Anjali was actually capable of that!

Fortunately for me, she only shook her head at me like a disappointed mother, "I expected better from you, Rynah."

"Come on! What's such a big deal about these people? They must be just like any other celebrities," I was getting a bit annoyed but looking at Anjali's expression, I got the doubts clouding my mind as I added for confirmation, "right?"

"I seriously can't believe you haven't heard about the Raivardhan brothers," Now it was her who grumbled in annoyance, making a dull memory of some national daily poke my mind from nowhere.

The Raivardhan brothers make it to Forbes again in the top ten billionaires of the world. The anchor had been squealing like a fanboy back then. That was how remembered the news.

"I think I have heard about them somewhere," I murmured, mostly to myself.

"That's it!" All of a sudden her mood changed again like she just discovered a new buoyancy and yelled 'Eureka!'

"When you live in India and don't know about Raivardhans, you don't know anything," she swished her hand before me like she was swatting a fly from the air. That had me amused. Was it really such a big deal with these Raivardhans people?

As if reading my thoughts, she winked at me, "Wait till the evening sets in, honey, you will know what the perfect species of men look like."

Her statement left me flabbergasted and gaping as she waltzed her way out of the room.

I couldn't help but look back at the mansion. Was Anjali exaggerating? Or were the Raivardhans really the epitome of hotness? No no, Anjali was never wrong in these matters.

I shook my head at the silly thoughts. I shouldn't be riled up, nor expect anything. I was an adult now, for the love of God! My hormones shouldn't affect me like a high-schooler!

But, I couldn't shake the feeling. If Anjali had said that they were damn good, maybe they really were good. And I shouldn't be judging anyone even before I see them.

I exhaled in exhaustion. The curiosity was seriously killing me. But I had no other choice either.

I would have to find it out myself in the evening.

3. TEEN

"And this brainy gentleman left the suitcase and ran behind the thief!" Everyone burst into roars of laughter as uncle Aadarsh finished narrating the incident that occurred with Kush.

"I really didn't realize that I even had a suitcase with me at that time," Kush scratched the back of his head embarrassed. Light blush tainting his cheeks.

It was seven in the evening and everyone was back from work. Aadarsh uncle and Kush welcomed us. Of course, Kush's welcome was more like a sarcastic tease rather than how Aadarsh uncle welcomed us.

"Oh! Are you still here? I thought that you would have already enrolled in the monastery," That was the first sentence that came out of Kush's mouth.

"Hardy har har," I narrowed my eyes on him. The troublemaker could never change.

"Why? Why monastery?" Ritika furrowed her eyebrows looking from me to Kush and then back to me. I just gritted my teeth at it while mentally chanting, 'Don't say it! Don't you dare say!'

Had anything ever gone in my way before to go in my way now?

"Because this little miss will eventually end up as a spinster, or..." He paused

to give me an evil grin, "or end up making a grandpa... debauchee." There he said it... Couldn't live without his cockiness, now can he?

"He. Is. Not. A. Grandpa," I gritted through my teeth. Agreed that Mr. Surya Kanth Nath was almost double my age, but he wasn't as ancient as Kush tends to exaggerate. At least, he shouldn't make it sound so bad...

In any case, if I did end up marrying Mr. Nath, let me at the very least not be haunted by these words for the rest of my life!

"Ohhh... Protective, and possessive!" Kush sang.

I swear I was going to smack his head any moment now.

"But I rather see her as a nun than see a hyperactive grandpa," he turned to Ritika explaining further. I raised my fisted hands in the air. If my life was a comic book, there would be some smoke coming out of my ears, a lot of smoke!

Looking at the fists, Kush's eyes widened a bit with amusement before he started walking backwards, "I was just kidding, kiddo! No need to take it so personally!"

Like yeah! Sure that was a joke that would haunt a lot of my nights now!

Sensing my murderous intent, he turned around and ran like a coward he was.

And I chased after him, shouting, "come back you, you moron! Wait till I catch you!"

"I still can't believe that he is earning but he still has a brain the size of a peanut! I don't even know which nut case hired him!" I found myself yelling at the top of my voice!

"Umm... Rynah, it was uncle Aadarsh who gave him a job..." Ritika who was seating on the sofa watching us supplied, pausing our cat and mouse chase. My eyes were now saucer wide and Kush was laughing his butts off while uncle Aadarsh who entered the room regarded me with a raised eyebrow.

I bit my lower lip and gave him an awkward smile, "my bad..."

And with that I chased after the troublemaker once again, who jumped over the sofa and ran upstairs, still laughing like a lunatic.

"Earth to the Miss Bad Temper!" Snapping of fingers before my face grabbed my attention. Anjali pursed her lips and wriggled her eyebrows, "you haven't seen any Raivardhans, yet. So whose thoughts are lost?"

"I was thinking about how to murder your brothers and not end up in jail," I sighed, slouching back.

"Well, if you conceive a plan, count me in," she mirrored my action, "I'm still trying to figure one out."

"Omg! I completely forgot!" All of a sudden she was back on her feet before grabbing hold of my hand, "come on!"

"Wait! Where are we going?" I laughed.

"To your room, of course!" Was her only reply before she dragged me all the way up to the second floor, just as she had said, to my room.

It was then I recalled that she had been keen to show me The Raivardhans. For some unknown reason, my stomach started to churn and twist. It felt silly to feel nervous about such a trivial thing. It wasn't like I was going to get married to one of them. If they were so famous, it was obvious that they were completely out of my league.

Anjali didn't even switch the lights on upon entering my temporary room. Guess, she had enough common sense to not be caught drooling over the boys from across the street.

We knelt over the love couch and looked at the beautifully lit mansion and just stared at the mansion in silence, admiring the beauty of the structure.

All of a sudden, light was turned on, in what I assume to be a room on the second floor and a figure walked in.

Anjali bent over the side of the couch making me wonder what she was doing. But when she sat back straight, I found an object in her hand that caused my mouth to drop open.

"You are kidding, right?" I felt dumbstruck looking at a pair of binoculars in her hands.

She just gave me a cool look replying, "I am forever prepared."

Shaking my head I watched her looking through her binoculars and squeal.

"Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! It's Daksh Raivardhan!" And I watched her act like a fangirl, amused.

"Here, take a look!" She passed me the binoculars so that I could see this *Daksh* person. I hesitated a bit initially, nevertheless, I looked through it for not being able to hold on to my curiosity. At first, I didn't know where I was looking but when I adjusted my view towards the lit window... It just took my breath away.

I stared at the handsome man in a white t-shirt and gray sweatpants. He was sitting by the window, working over his laptop.

His perfectly built muscles flexed through his tight t-shirt whenever he took a

swing from the soft drink can, that was placed on the side table beside him. His dark hair swept back making him look even hotter. The well groomed stubble gave him a mysterious air.

"Hot, isn't he?" Anjali's voice asked.

"Yes," All I could muster was a low murmur.

"You can stop fanning yourself, darling," Anjali giggled, and that was the cue for my cheeks to flush red.

Subconsciously, I had been fanning myself with my other hand. How could a boy be so handsome? It was unfair for other male species around the world who were less fortunate. I would have to take back what I had thought earlier. He wasn't a boy, in no sense he looked like a boy! He was a man. An attractive one at that!

"Now, give that to me. It's my turn," she snatched the binoculars from my hands and started stalking the hunk seated by the glass wall, in the beautiful mansion.

We had lost track of time, for I didn't know for how long both of us stalked him, shamelessly. Well, it was till he left the room, which looked like a library with loads and loads of books! . My mother would be so disappointed in me if she knew what we were doing up here. Not that any of us were going to whisper a word about this to her.

We sat back on the couch and stared at nothing in particular, just into the darkness of the room. We had yet to switch the lights on. Our minds were mushy with all the thoughts that should not be going through our minds.

I exhaled the breath I didn't even realize I was holding while Anjali was grinning like a goof.

"I never..." I trailed off not knowing what to say, so I moved my hands randomly before me trying to complete the sentence.

"Thought?" Anjali supplied.

I nodded enthusiastically, "Yeah, never thought that..." only to be left speechless in the middle of the sentence again. Why was my mouth not working when I wanted to express myself? Most of the time, things came out rather unfiltered but now, right here, I was not able to speak the words that were exploding in my head.

"Anyone can be as handsome as him?"

I shrugged before nodding, "yeah."

Well, even if I was lacking speech, it wasn't illegal to admit what thoughts had occupied my head.

"Wait till you see the other brothers," She winked at me in the dark. Her face illuminated from the streetlight that had turned on sometime later while we were busy ogling at the guy.

"I can imagine," I could believe her. She was right the first time too, "Now, I can't wait to see others."

Immediately, an idea came to me. Taking out my phone, I started to Google search.

"Nah-ah-ah, you are not going to google them, darling," I pouted at Anjali's words.

"I want you to see them live, up front and not a still picture of them," she justified herself.

I still felt curious to find out more about the other brothers but I commended

her words, as I looked back at the house with the hope of seeing someone else there. Some other brother.

What did a girl need to do, to see more of the hotties like that all the time?

Guess, this was how fate worked. Enjoying the misery and desires of young, innocent girls like me by pushing them to a Santa Claus while keeping the finest species of the male population right before their very own eyes.

4. CHAAR

My eyes flashed open in alarm before staring at the pretty ceiling interiors.

"That's pretty..." I murmured in my dazed self before the panic set in. I whizzed into a sitting position.

"Omg! Omg! Did I get lost? Where the hell am I?" My hoarse voice, my eyes saucer wide, my panicked self almost pounding on the bed like a child throwing tantrum and my bush for morning hair looked comical in the full-length mirror opposite to the bed.

The door opened on cue leaving a worried looking Anjali rush in, "you okay?"

Looking at Anjali, everything came back to me like a vivid dream. Oh yeah! I was at aunt Lasika's house and not lost somewhere like some of the nightmares that I have had since childhood...

"Probably, she dreamt about Mr. Nath," Luv snickered from the doorway.

"Or, might have seen the heart attack he would get on their wedding night," Kush wasn't very far behind in this kind of opportunity. Both the brothers high-fived as they continued to laugh.

"You two baboons better get lost before I decide to chop your ears off,"

Anjali warned as she headed towards the door.

"So, if we are baboons, so are you," Kush stuck his tongue like a mature adult he was.

"No, I'm a human. Unlike you two clown faced baboons," Anjali threw her hair over her shoulder.

"Your theory doesn't make any sense, you know?" Luv folded his arms across his chest.

"It does, when a human family adopts a pair of clown faced baboons," with that she had shut the door on their faces with a sass.

"That was savage," I gave her a thumbs up, quite proud of her.

"Thank you," she plopped down on the bed, "so, you freaked out again?"

Rubbing the back of my neck sheepishly, I smiled, "yeah."

It was usual for me to freak out by waking up in unfamiliar places. It always has been and I don't think it would change any time soon. Our family doctor didn't exactly recognize it as a disease, so we sorted for our own remedies to prevent it...

"I was going to wake you-" Anjali was interrupted by the ringing of my phone. She picked it up from the nightstand and passed it to me.

Mayank calling...

Why was he calling me at this hour? Did I forget anything?

"Where in the hell are you Rynah? I've been calling you for hours now!" Was the first thing I heard from the other side.

"Well, hello to you too, Mr. Grumpy pants. Where did you light your back on fire?" I gave him a flat reply climbing out of my bed.

"Young lady, don't use that tone with me," he warned playfully, "you should learn to talk like a lady."

"And you are a ninety-four year old grandpa, right? I don't know how Prerna even tolerates you," I retorted. Immediately, I froze as my eyes widened, "oh crap! Prerna!"

"Finally she remembers it," grumbled Mayank on the other side of the line.

It was Prerna's birthday, Prerna Chopra, my best friend from college. And I forgot her birthday at the last moment when I had been preparing for it for a week!

The irony of the situation...

"Mayank, I'll be there in an hour, till then handle everything," I ended the call without even waiting for his reply.

Immediately, I lifted my travel bag and placed it horizontally over the bed before digging my hands into it.

"What are you doing?" I jumped at Anjali's question. I had completely forgotten that she was still in the room. She rolled her eyes at my little jump scare and looked down curiously at me.

"I forgot that it was Prerna's birthday today. And I should have been there already helping with the preparations. Prerna wouldn't approve of anything less than perfect, I seem to have forgotten my party clothes at the ironing stand and I am still not there! How is everything such a mess already!" I rambled moving back and forth to stop and look at her raised eyebrows and added, "and I am blabbering."

I sat down beside her with my head in my hands as I sighed, "I am such a mess. No wonder, nobody wants to marry me except that uncle..."

Her face softened as she put her arms around me, "Aww... who told you that you are a mess? You are such a lovely girl! Don't be so harsh on yourself. And I know that God can't be so cruel to his pretty child. He has a surprise in his store for you."

I smiled at her ruefully, "I hope you are right."

"You will see that I am always right," I rolled my eyes playfully at her words while she stood up and started to pull me by my hand. I let her drag me out of the room and towards her room.

"Where are you taking me?" I finally asked her as she opened the door to her room.

She playfully shoved me inside before closing the door and skipping her way towards me, making me laugh, "what are you doing? I am running short on time."

"Just fifteen minutes. The best friend of the birthday girl can't look like she just woke up," winking at me, Anjali pushed me towards her washroom, "quickly freshen up, you have only five minutes." Saying that she closed the door, "oh, the new brush is for you on the counter," She yelled from the other side of the door. Rolling my eyes, I took no time in brushing my teeth and took a quick shower before coming out in a towel wrapped around my body.

She smiled at me, "good girl," before pushing towards her dressing table. I could see she had already placed several cosmetics on it.

Hesitantly, I sat down eyeing her with curiosity while she started doing her magic with her cosmetics on me.

Whenever I moved a bit, she would smack the side of my head and scowl at me before scolding me to sit still. It didn't take long, she just cleansed, scrubbed and toned before applying a layer of moisturizer and sunscreen. Then the only thing she worked on was my eyes. She gave me orangish-pink and black smokey eyes. Some lip gloss on my lips and I was ready to go.

I was grateful to God for giving me clear skin.

I got up to rush outside but Anjali grabbed my shoulders and pushed me back onto the chair.

"What?" I couldn't help but ask when she gave me a flat look.

"Are you seriously going to the biggest club in the city, in a towel? I am sure that will steal the spotlight from the birthday girl."

My head whipped down to look at my attire when her words registered in my mind.

Oh crap! I was seriously going to go in a towel?

While I was busy cursing myself, Anjali took out a neatly packed box and handed it to me.

"What's this?" I furrowed my brows at the green exteriors of the box.

"These," she stretched the word before continuing, "are your clothes for the day."

I opened the box to see a pretty shiny black veiled top with a backless cream inner.

"Wow, it's so pretty!" I gaped at the top.

"I know right?" Passing the top to me, she pulled out the black jeggings out

of her wardrobe, "pair it up with this."

"Okay," beaming widely I ran to the washroom to change my clothes. Within no time I was already out too. The clothing looked perfect, the perks of being the same size as Anjali.

"Woah..." Kush, who had only entered the room, gaped as he gave me a top to bottom scan.

"I know," Anjali gave a superior smile, eyeing her work.

"Thank you so much, Anju," I gave Anjali a quick hug when my phone started to ring with Mayank's name on it.

"Gotta go, bye," putting on my medium-sized heels from my room, I slipped the envelope from the nightstand that I was going to give my friend into my back pocket, I rushed down but not before accepting the call, "I'm so sorry Mayank! I am on my way. I will be there in fifteen minutes."

I knew it was impossible to reach there in fifteen minutes but I had to tell him a time to keep him calm. Poor guy was already dying of agitation, "Rynah please [yaar](#), don't do this to me. I can already feel my heart experiencing a seizure. I will die of hysteria here... Nothing is ready for the party yet! What should I do? Perna will be disappointed with my preparations. Completely disappointed. And you aren't here yet..." I heard my name being called in the background but I was so engrossed in Mayank's rants that I didn't hear my mother call my name.

I rushed out of the house, still trying to comfort him, "Mayank, relax. I'll be there soon. And Perna would be very happy."

I was almost jogging now when I heard the loudest barks ever. And turning to look at the source was my biggest mistake.

My eyes widened and my heart froze. On its own accord, my legs ran as fast as they could carry my body over the high heels, adrenaline rushed through my veins. Screaming like a Banshee when a huge street dog chased me down the road, barking wildly, I ran towards the only resort that was available to me.

The only gate slightly left open at the end of the road. At that time, I hadn't noticed the empty watchman's cabin playing an important role in the path of changing my destiny.

Without thinking much, I pulled open the gate before pulling it shut behind me. My breathing was ragged, while relief was slowly seeping into me. I couldn't believe that I made it to my safe haven on my heels!

The barking of the dog continued on the other side of the gate, making me turn to face the gate and peep through what little space was present between the metallic design. It looked like an old dog, shedding its body hair and unfocused eyes. I was cent percent sure that it was a mad dog.

"Just go away will you!?!!" I exclaimed, throwing my hands in the air, "Seriously, why does my day have to start this way?"

The ringing of my phone caught my attention.

As soon as I received it, Kush bombarded me with his questions, "where are you? Did the crazy dog chase you? Did you even see a dog? Did your mom warned you about it? I told her to warn you about it."

"oh, I was chased by it..." I mumbled pouting.

"What?" There was silence on the other side of the line for a while and I thought that he did not hear my reply but he proved me wrong when he started to laugh mercilessly. His laughing sound increased in volume, irritating me.

"Are you going to keep laughing at me like that? Or are you going to help me? I'm still trapped inside some mansion over here and that dog is still barking at me," I gave another glance at the dog as goosebumps crawled all over my skin.

"Did it bite you?"

"No, not yet."

"Then I am not going to endanger my life. My existence is precious, after all, I am one of a kind," I gave a flat look to no one in particular but hearing his words I so wanted to strangle him through the phone.

"Anyway, it will run away after a while. So chillax, and stay put in your place," was what he added when he felt my anger radiating through the communicating device.

Saying 'arrivederci', he ended the call. It was confirmed, he just wanted to have a good laugh at my expense.

"Kush! You idiotic fellow! Wait till I kick you to the moon and back!" I was angry and frustrated. Without another thought, I let out a frustrated scream but immediately stopped when I realized that I was at an unfamiliar place. Well, looking around it now just took my breath away. It wasn't a mansion, it looked like a modern-day castle instead. Aunt Lasika's house felt like a toy house before this one. The well maintained green lush of life, the exotic exterior design, the expensive artifacts, and fountains got me thinking if I by any chance died and went to heaven.

"Wait a minute, where am I really?" I wondered to myself. The silence in the atmosphere sent a chill down my spine. For the first time, I felt the power in the air that I had never felt before. Anyway, no matter how tempting the place looked, it was better if I got out of here as soon as possible. I didn't want to end up in jail on trespassing charges.

The dog had stopped barking, so I peeped through the gate again to see if it had already left me alone. Relief engulfed me when there wasn't any dog in the line of sight.

I cracked opened the gate and searched for it again only to find nothing.

It must have chased after something else...

Sighing out loud, I walked out of the gate, not without whipping my head constantly to see if the rabid dog would jump out of somewhere, before hailing for a cab that I seemed to have found by pure luck. I bet my whole year's luck was maxed out by this incident. I couldn't help but glance at the mansion behind one last time. It was 'the Raivardhan' mansion that Anjali stalked into every evening. The ones who live here must be super lucky ones.

Only if I knew this thought would come back haunting me real soon.

I thought that no one knew that I had stepped into the boundary of the Raivardhan mansion, the place which was off limits to any general public, except me as there was no one there to witness it. Not even the scary watchmen I had seen the previous day. But I was wrong. I was dead wrong.

What I didn't know was that there were three pairs of eyes watching my every single movement. From the time I walked through the gate, I might want to change that to 'run' through the gate like a mad lady till the time I walked out, I was being watched. And also heard. How embarrassing...

Only if I had known.

But I didn't. So, I wasn't prepared for the cyclone that was headed my way. A cyclone that would destroy all the meaning of my life. A cyclone that would cause havoc in my absolutely normal, boring life. A cyclone that would make me want to laugh and cry at the same time, like a lunatic. Maybe they were a cyclone, or maybe not, but I didn't know about it. Yet, they weren't anything

less than it.

A cyclone named the Raivardhans.

5. PAANCH

"What in the hell took you so long?" That was how I was greeted up on entering the club. No hi or hello or even *'you look so nice in the borrowed clothes!'*

Okay, that might not have been something to be expected. It would be moreover full of mortification...

I turned around to face the owner of the voice. The short fellow around my height, with typical black Indian hair and his blinking brown eyes, stared at me.

"Is it just me or does she really look different?" Mayank finally spoke after staring at me for a whole minute like a mute.

"Thank you," I grinned toothily at him because getting that out of him was just as good as hearing that I was looking gorgeous. He was never generous with his compliments, except for Prerna, he would never compliment any other girl. Even if it was his best friend.

Shaking his head, he started barking orders around, "Pratyusha, check with the DJ yaar, why isn't that guy here yet? Madhav, tell them about the plan."

Then he turned towards me, "Rynah please check with the food and the cake. Those are the most important aspects of this party that I am entrusting you

with. Make sure that they have nailed it."

He patted my upper arm twice before going back with other preparations.

And I understood his desperation. He wanted everything to be perfect for Prerna, and it was really cute and romantic of him to plan the party and worry that it wouldn't be up to the mark.

I did what he had asked me to. The buffet was set on the rooftop space of the club. And the cuisine just tasted heavenly. I fell in love with the lasagne and chili chicken. I even requested to taste it twice. The time just flew so fast and soon it was the time to surprise Prerna.

Mayank had left to 'lure' Prerna to the location, as he was putting it, about half an hour ago while we waited for them patiently. The last minute preparations never seemed to come to an end.

Prerna could be really handful sometimes. Especially when she was at her *time of the month*. Ah ha baby, period were Mayank's nightmare. And... That happened to be today...

"Where are you dragging me off like a criminal, Mayank? Careful! Do you want to make me limp for the rest of my life? And I told you already that I cannot at all dance in this condition, what if I make a tattoo behind me on my dress? If that happens, I will make you wash it till I have my white dress back!" We could hear Prerna nagging from the other side of the door while we controlled ourselves from laughing uncontrollably. Seriously, this time it was way worse than the other times. Poor Mayank...

"Gosh, baby! Do you have to talk about all that now? And why did you wear a white dress when you were... You know what I mean, right?" Mayank had freaked out, we could evidently hear it in his voice.

"Periods, Mayank! It's called periods, menstruation! It's not 'you know what

I mean' and I will wear what I want! Whether it be a white dress or a granny's dress or a bikini! We are in a free country and I will make you wash the stain if it happens to occur," Prerna's tone was very heated and I swear I could picture Mayank sweating profusely standing before her, under her perfectly manicured nail of her index finger. It was always the same and I don't think that it was ever going to change.

Then the whispering started that we weren't able to hear, but I was damn sure that it was Mayank who was pleading his case to her. And soon after that Prerna cut some slack on him, "Okay baby, this is just one time. Only for you."

With that said, they finally opened the doors as everyone shouted, "Surprise! Happy birthday!"

Prerna was genuinely surprised as she started to laugh which changed to her joyful tears soon after and hugged Mayank, very tightly might I add.

That was the famous Mayank's magic, only he, Prerna and God knows what he tells her that she always gives in to him, no matter how serious or ridiculous the situation would have turned out to be. He was like her kryptonite.

She was in a chain halter neck asymmetric dress paired with silver pencil heels. Her burgundy hair was now straightened. The gray freckles in her brown eyes sparkled at the sight before her.

I walked towards her when they had pulled away and gave her a big hug while singing, "Happy birthday, lazy *gurl*."

"Thank you so much, crazy *gurl*!" She sounded elated, making me more happy for her. Those were our nicknames for each other, 'lazy *gurl* Prerna' and 'crazy *gurl* Rynah' especially with an American accent following their slang just because we both do so much justice to those names. And Prerna

had a thing for American English.

When we parted from our eternal hug, I and Mayank stepped aside, letting others greet her before I took out the envelope from my back pocket and handed it to her. I was so glad that it arrived right on time the previous day at Aunt Lasika's house.

"What's this?" She curiously opened the envelope and looked at the contents inside before she started to squeal like how she squeals while running from lizards and gave me another big hug, "Thank you, thank you, thank you so much!"

"What did you give her that she looks like she's going to faint now?" Mayank who had been patiently standing there all this time asked, baffled, "She didn't even show this much excitement for my party arrangements!"

"It's two concert tickets for A. R. Rehman's performance in Mumbai! I have always wanted to go to his concerts!" Perna chirped happily while I gave Mayank a superior smile.

"And all my hard work just went down the drain, didn't it?" He said it with the face of a little boy who just lost his favorite toy.

"Aww...." Both me and Perna rushed towards him as we enveloped him in a group hug. He was like a brother to me and I was the sister he never had. So, it made me feel a bit guilty to give him a bit of a hard time after all the hard work he had done.

"You both are always special to me," Perna reassured him but still didn't forget about me.

"But I'm a bit more special than her," look at the guts of this guy. I gave him a stinky eye as I retorted, "yeah, because you are an ogre who needs more love."

He pulled back with a protest, "hey! I am not an ogre!"

"Definitely are one, with that nasty attitude," Prerna chimed in, starting a new argument with him which continued between them.

"If I am an ogre, then you are my Fiona!" He used Shrek's reference... What a brain he has got there... Of the size of the pea. He just dug his own grave.

"Hahaha... I am so not green and we are definitely so not living happily ever after," Prerna snorted, then she suddenly turned towards me asking, "do I look all green to you?"

I just shrugged innocently not wanting to get dragged into it again.

"Then, that's it! We are breaking up," announced Prerna turning back to Mayank making his mouth drop open but didn't surprise me greatly. This was the scene I was greatly accustomed to, and I also knew what was going to come next.

"I am sorry, baby! I said it as a joke, promise!" Mayank apologized with pleading eyes.

Prerna just raised her nose in the air in mock anger making Mayank give a short laugh, "okay, let's see if you can still be so angry at me even after this."

The lights dimmed when he clapped his hands twice and the center stage cleared off the people, who now stood on the side watching just as excited as us. I and Prerna shared a confused look. He hadn't told me anything about this part. It was a surprise for me too. What had Mayank arranged now?

The DJ started the music and I immediately recognized the all so familiar music of the song. *Mi Gente*.

The smoke cleared a bit and we could see silhouette of five guys on the

center stage. The laser lights flashed around before the spotlight illuminated the five guys who started to dance. Their faces finally illuminated. And that was it, both I and Prerna screamed! It was not just us but everyone around cheered, shrieked or catcalled and what not. We were excited because it was a famous dance group called 'Ikonista' after all!

These guys were insanely amazing! One of my favorites too. And Prerna was completely crazy about them. And that was how I learned about them, through Prerna. It had broken my heart when I heard that they broke apart as a group. I don't know how Mayank pulled it out, getting all the boys together again, for this one party.

The song had only started and the first four verses of the song played through.

The crowd cheered as the performers did their famous contemporary fusion of dance styles. I honestly didn't know even the 'D' in the dancing styles and their performance made my already limited knowledge even more limited.

I recognized middle lines of the first verse of the song playing in the background. When there was shuffling and sliding and robot dance fusion and all that stuff that I couldn't possibly explain without being unjust.

By the end of the first verse, the dancers separated from their team formation and ran in different directions before occupying a higher location and resumed their dancing. It was difficult to choose whom to watch among the five, they were all brilliant!

I watched dancer Pratik for a while before shifting my eyes to Shrayas. We couldn't help but bob our heads and dance right where we were stationed. Anshuman was up with the DJ, both of their actions looked well choreographed. As if they had rehearsed it earlier.

'*Me Gusta*' That was the one of the very few lines of the song that I could

sing along, cons for not knowing Spanish language...

"Freeze!" Everyone shouted as we threw our hands up! Rohan did a little somersault over the table. While Ishant froze in the middle like a statue.

'J Balvin, Willy William

Te Gusta' My confidence was as good as I was a native Spanish speaker just for these two lines. Cheap thrills of a dumb girl...

"Freeze!" I shouted louder than the last time, enjoying the thrill coursing through my veins.

The second verse was ending but it wasn't the DJ just playing the track, someone was singing the song over the mic. And surprisingly, it was sung well, like how a professional native Spanish singer would sing.

Everyone's eyes now searched for the singer, including the Ikonista members who had stopped to look at who was singing. From the top of the stairs that led to the mezzanine, someone walked down wearing a black fedora rock star hat with a charcoal strip, red silk dress shirt under a black vest and midnight blue jeans.

The style of him holding the mic was enough to swoon, no wonder everyone cheered for him. I couldn't see his face properly, yet I couldn't help but admit how hot he looked. He elegantly removed his hat and threw it at the shrieking crowd who went hysteric with hooting and hollers upon seeing his face! Even Perna was screaming her throat out beside me while all I could do was close my ears and give her a funny look.

I looked back at the new singer and gosh, he sure was a heartthrob! And the way he carried himself made him a rock star. From the corner of my eyes, Perna jumped over Mayank to envelop him in a bear tight hug and bombarding him with kisses all over his face.

The Ikonista members chuckled in surprise as each of them gave the new guy a high five or a side hug while he continued to sing. I must say his Spanish was flawless! Even the accent! I wish I could someday speak that well, let alone sing.

When did Mayank even manage to arrange all this?

The DJ threw a wireless head microphone at the singer which he caught effortlessly and put it around his head and tugged the bulky part of it behind his back before all the six of them resumed dancing, after passing the handheld mike to someone behind him.

The girls gravitated to him automatically, and it was really surprising to see him keeping up with the Ikonista moves. Gosh, not only was he a really good singer but also an exceptionally good dancer. Who was this guy, anyway?

In no time, Prerna was beside him as they all did easier steps for the crowd to follow. He did twirl some girls who were giggling like lunatics all the time or had a gaping mouth. Had my grandma been alive, she would have remarked, “what a gentleman he is!”

Doing a classic slide to stand beside Prerna again, he dipped her, making me turn to watch Mayank’s expression, suspecting him to be jealous of the new hot guy. But instead, all he did was gape like an awestruck little boy. Am I dreaming right now? Or was this really happening? I mean, Mayank was speechless and not jealous?

The timer I had set went off reminding me to do one last check with the buffet, and I started walking towards the stairs, still observing Mayank.

The ending pre-chorus of the song was on.

When I turned to see Prerna, she was standing at the singer's side as he finished the song, everyone were jumping and shrieking except me. It looked

like everyone else knew about him. All I could do was stare at the singer confused when our eyes met. He started to walk towards me. That rendered me into a blinking doll with a terrible eyes malfunction.

Okay, maybe not towards me perhaps towards someone beside me or behind me. There was no way I know him, so why would he come towards me? The background still had the ending tune of Mi Gente. He had this mischievous smirk playing on his lips.

The music died as everyone shrieked at the top of their heads. Before he could cover even half the distance to wherever he was headed, he got engulfed in a crowd of girls and even guys. Poor guy, so much for that swag. Now, it would need a miracle to get out of there. Shaking my head, I turned and moved to stand by the stairs, casting one last glance at the singer's situation. All I could see was heads containing long hair, just as I suspected, he wasn't getting out of there so easily. Perhaps I would be hearing him screaming for help anytime soon.

As if being called, a group of guards rolled in and distanced the crowd from him. He didn't look half as fluttered as he should have been. He looked up to meet my gaze like I had just called for him. I gave him a confused look thinking he would just look away, instead he winked at me or maybe someone around me before making his way towards the elevator. I just stood there, my head buffering at what just happened.

Okay, that was definitely in my head.

Shaking my head at the fantasy that had been fabricating in my head about the stranger or the so-called attention that I was imagining to be receiving from him, I started to climb the stairs.

People don't do that Rynah, especially guys like him don't take interest in anyone like me.

By the time I reached the top, I was cursing myself and the damn heels. Walking in them was one thing but climbing the stairs was another. I paused at the entrance and took a deep breath, letting my aching legs relax. At least, I made it before Perna did, right?

Quickly inquiring around if everything was fine and checking the three-tier red velvet cake, I sent an 'okay' message to Mayank who had been waiting downstairs with Perna and other guests.

The last thing I expected was my heel to snap while I turned to leave. It was so sudden that it took me a second to realize what had happened. I was on the ground with an aching ass and twisted ankle...

Ouch...

For Mayank's fortune, I didn't take the cake down with me but that didn't mean that I didn't cause any damage at all...

In the hustle of the fall, reflexively I tried to grab onto the nearest thing, which happened to be a tablecloth containing the pyramid of wine glasses stacked above it. The glasses had trembled and fell. Half of them fell into the small fountain beside it. The other sparkled like stars after breaking on the ground.

Everyone stopped to stare at me like a statue. As if a game of freeze is going on. And I felt the time stop as cold sweat broke over my forehead. What was I going to do? The anxiety was yet to set in and I guess I was waiting for that to happen.

"Manager!" called a silky voice from behind me grabbing everyone's attention. I looked over my shoulder to find the guy who sang earlier, sitting there with an amused look. He sure was enjoying my misery. The manager rushed to him as if he was a butler being called, "yes, sir?"

"Get another set of glasses stacked quick. And..." the performer paused to direct a smirk in my direction, "send the damage bill to me."

WHAT?

Did I hear that right or were my ears ringing? Why did he take the bill of the damage caused by me?

As if reading my mind, he started in my direction just to stop before me. I was still on the ground and mulling over all the things that were happening to me today. I mean seriously, was today supposed to be a crazy dream?

From this angle, I had a better view of his chiseled face. His dark hair with highlights was windswept styled and his stubble was just a five o'clock shadow. Mirth sparkled in his bright brown eyes like that of a kindergartner before disappearing into the innocent look, making me think that I had imagined it. The side of his lips tilted upwards in a tiny of smirk, making him look not so kindergartner.

He extended his hand offering me help. And I took it without thinking, still completely flabbergasted. His tall structure slightly intimidated me. This close to a handsome man had rendered my mind blank.

"You okay?" He asked politely. I nodded timidly mumbling a 'fine'. There was something about this guy I couldn't put a finger on. Something about his aura which screamed don't mess with me and at the same time made him look approachable.

He helped me to sit on a nearby chair while the waiters rushed to complete his given order.

"I hope I don't sound rude, but who are you again? And why did you take the bill that I am supposed to pay?" I asked out of curiosity, after clearing my throat. My questions made him raise his eyebrows for a moment before an

amused smirk took over his lips.

"Sorry for being impolite, I am Aaryan," he raised his hand for me to shake, and when I accepted it, he added, "Aaryan Raivardhan."

6. CHEY

As soon as those words reached my ears, my jaw hit the floor. My body stiffened on its own accord. He must be joking. He was kidding, right?

I didn't know what I was doing exactly. But I did know that whatever I was doing wasn't what a normal person would do given the situation. I grabbed the sleeve of the waiter who was walking past us and asked, not so subtly, "Do you know this person?"

I pointed at the Raivardhan claimer causing waiter's eyes to widen to the size of saucers and look back and forth between me and Aaryan before answering, "T-that's Mr. Aaryan Raivardhan."

Immediately, he pulled his sleeve away from my grip, like my touch had burnt him before scurrying away as fast as his legs could carried him. I didn't turn to look at Aaryan. I couldn't... My courage jumped out the wall and

jumped to its death. My heartbeat had doubled its pace. I was in a state of shock.

I huffed out the air that had stuck in my lungs, well it felt more like my breath was knocked out.

This was a dream, right? Because, if this would have been a reality, I would die out of embarrassment.

"What are you doing?" His voice sounded concerned, but the amused smirk and the raised eyebrow told me otherwise. I looked down to note that I was pinching myself only to feel a sharp pain at the spot, "Ouch!"

It shouldn't be painful, it was supposed to be a dream! But it was paining, then this wasn't a dream! Reality hit me like a truck on the highway. This was utterly embarrassing... I was only embarrassing myself more and more as I spent my time in his presence.

"I am really sorry Mr. Raivardhan. I didn't mean to- I- what- no- er... I- sorry! I'll pay you back soon! I promise!" I sprang up from my seat to make a run before I worsened my situation. But fate was cruel you see... The sudden weight on my legs due to the precipitate movement pained my sprained ankle, "Oww...! Ow! Ow! Ow!" I hopped a bit in my place before sitting back on the chair. My hair cascaded on the side acting as a screen, hiding my flushed face. Discreetly, I glanced at Aaryan to gauge his reaction.

He looked at me for a second before he burst out laughing. I just gaped at this weird guy who doubled over in laughter. Only rolling on the floor remained. His laugh slowly toned down but as soon as he would see me, he went into fits of laughter again.

A cloud of annoyance had formed over my head as I crossed my arms across my chest and waited for him to stop. But no! I had a gut feeling that he wouldn't be stopping anytime soon!

He held his stomach and wiped the invisible tear from the side of his eye as miraculously his laughter finally ceased.

He looked at me, thoroughly enjoying my downhearted plight. The end of his lips curled up in an irritating smirk making my eyes narrow at him.

He raised his hands in mock surrender, "sorry, but not my fault when my company is unusually entertaining." He wasn't sorry even for a bit.

"Are you really Aaryan Raivardhan or did you just secretly bribe the waiter to collude with you," I retorted, making him smirk wider. He took out his wallet and fished for something in, before producing a solid card before me.

There was a photo of his face beside his name.

Aaryan Raivardhan.

My lips had formed an 'o' as I stared at the card.

"Still have any doubts about my identity, Ms. Detective?" He joked.

"That pic is awful," my eyes widened when I realized what I had confessed out loud. He stared at me like a frozen statue in surprise causing the blood to flush to my face again. Did I seriously have to say that out loud? Couldn't I have shut my big mouth for once? The last time I opened my mouth like that before a higher authority of an internship agency, I was gracefully escorted out of the building and was asked to never come anywhere close to it. In my defense, I just pointed out that his wig was put on his head the wrong way. How would have I known that he had recently undergone hair implantation?

Biting my lower lip, I squeezed my eyes shut, "that's not what I meant! I am so sorry..." I was prepared for him to call the guards to throw me out but what surprised me more was when he went hysteric with laughter again. I slowly opened one of my eyes and peered at him before opening the other. Was this

guy truly sane or was I sitting with a nutcase?

I stared at him scrupulously.

"Oh! Don't give me that look! I can't help it when you amuse me," he shook his head to himself.

"What look?"

"That look, where you are contemplating whether to run to the hills or to call a psychiatrist on me." He was creeping me out now.

"H-how did y-you know that?" I was a stuttering mess, no doubt.

It was like I triggered a memory rendering him with a distant look. His face, void of every sentiment, like he was carved out of marble. But his eyes, his eyes held an unfathomable emotion, something that made them very beautiful and vulnerable at the same time. That was the only feature that gave life to the beautiful stone statue, his lips moved as if he was talking to himself rather than me, "when you are forced to grow up before your age, you will learn to read the real face of the people."

What?

He left me more confused than freaked out.

As if he never said it, he snapped back to the present and flashed me his brilliant smile, "You know what? You should see a doctor as soon as possible, maybe I can help you too with that. But right now, I'll let you enjoy your friend's party."

He was already up and was about to leave when I called after him, "Mr. Raivardhan—" and was immediately cut off by him interjecting, "Aaryan. Just call me Aaryan, I am not so old either."

"Okay, Aaryan," I started again with a nod, "thank you so much for whatever you did but please let me pay you back. It would make me feel better."

He just looked at me as the end of his lips tugged upward in a ghost of a smile, or smirk, I don't know which it was though, "we will meet again soon, senorita." And off he was, walking away as elegantly as a cheetah would walk. I just shook my head at my luck. No doubt, I was currently the center of attention among the staff but not for too long as the birthday girl and the rest of the company walked through the door. Wait till Prerna and Anjali hear about it.

"Ouch!" I scowled at my aching ankle. I had removed my heels long ago as I carried them in my hand, along with my bag. My other hand took the support of the wall to avoid falling. My aching ankle raised a foot above in the air as I hopped my way out of the elevator. I only needed to make it out of the main door before hailing a cab. The only problem would be the availability of the cabs at this hour.

"Are you alright?" Prerna's worried voice boomed from beside me.

"Yeah... I guess," I tried to be as honest as possible.

"Let me help you," this was what I feared. She would sacrifice her birthday party and assist me all the way to the doctor if she knew about it. I had to busy myself with random people making her unsuspecting of my situation. Then without actually telling her about my ankle and ruining the party for her, I had hobbled my way out. But nothing could escape her eyes.

She pulled my arm around her shoulder, supporting half of my weight. And it didn't take much time for Mayank to react. He was on the other side of mine, mirroring Prerna's actions.

"How did you end up like this, kiddo?" Mayank questioned, easily dragging me towards the doors.

"Broke my heel..." No, I didn't lie, in fact, it was very much the truth! Maybe a part of the truth nevertheless, it was true.

"Only you can manage to do those things," Prerna shook her head while Mayank nodded in agreement. I just rolled my eyes.

We made it out the doors when Mayank announced, "I'll go get the car. You both stay here." And he was gone even before I could open my mouth.

What we weren't expecting was a black Porsche Cayman to halt before us, and the window rolled down. I and Prerna simultaneously gasped looking at the person sitting behind the wheel.

He had his night Oakley on, his one hand resting on the wheel while the other on the gear. Slowly and gracefully, he turned his head to face us, "Ms. Chopra and Kundra." His greeting sounded polite yet playful.

"Mr. Raivardhan," Prerna returned his greeting while I was busy opening and closing my mouth. My voice died down somewhere in my throat. When he said that we will meet soon, I didn't expect him to meet me this soon! So what if I was oddly comfortable around him, like how I felt around Luv or even Kush? But I still wasn't over my embarrassment.

"You are blushing, darling," Prerna sang under her breath, warning me of my burning face.

"Please call me Aaryan. Mr. Raivardhan makes me feel like a great grandpa waiting for his great-grandson to be born." Prerna giggled at his words.

"So, Aaryan. What brings you here?" I let Prerna do all the talking. At least she wouldn't make a fool out of herself, unlike me...

"I noticed Ms. Rynah was hobbling with great difficulty. Just wanted to offer my help to get her ankle fixed," he explained.

"Yeah, right! Your brother's a doctor, right?" Prerna's eyes lit up and I knew immediately that something was cooking in her head.

"N-no! I-it's fine. N-nothing serious!" My words fell on deaf ears because they both ignored me and continued, "surgeon, my brother's a surgeon but he expertises in other stuff too."

"Of course, how silly of me!" Prerna gave out a high pitched laugh of a witch's making me flinch in the process.

"If you want, I can give you a ride. I am heading out to Jubilee Hills anyway," he unlocked the door waiting for me to open it but all I did was stare at him.

Just one question burned in my head, *HOW IN THE HELL DID HE KNOW WHERE I LIVED?*

"Great idea! That would help us a lot too!" Prerna opened the door as she went on blabbering about something that I wasn't even paying attention to. My mind had stopped working when I heard him say Jubilee Hills.

"B-But...I... We... Er-" and I was a stuttering mess once again, who was now seated on the expensive leather in an amazing smelling car. Prerna shut the door after putting on the seat belt for me. I watched her stand back and wave, yelling, "Call me once you reach home! Good night, babe!"

My brain was still processing what just happened when Aaryan drove out of the circular path and out of the gates. Then realization poured over me like monsoon downpour. My *BESTIE* abandoned me with a *TOTAL STRANGER!* Okay, maybe not a complete stranger, he might be exclusively popular nowadays but he still was one, for me at least. What was she thinking?!?

"H-HOW DID YOU KNOW WHERE I LIVED?!?" I shouted at the top of my voice feeling creeped out by the idea of him stalking me. By the way, why would he stalk me?

"Because, I live in Jubilee Hills too and I found this fallen on the floor," he pulled out a sheet with my name and address written on it. It was still in my bag? Well, not anymore, now that he had found it. It was the parcel cover of the concert tickets that I had given to Prerna. I had ordered the parcel to be delivered at Anjali's house.

"Oh," I sighed in relief, sitting back straighter.

"You are something else, Rynah," Aaryan smirked, chuckling. I just rolled my eyes making him chortle some more.

The ride went surprisingly better than I had expected. Okay, much much better actually, not that he needed to know. I felt surprisingly relaxed and comfortable around Aaryan. He was not at all like the person I expected him to be. His friendly aura made me open up to him. We talked and laughed and argued like siblings. He wasn't all that gentlemanly either. He teasingly insulted me just like how Luv or Kush used to do back in high school. And I didn't leave a chance to insult him back. And just like that, we had connected.

"So, Aaryan. What do you do exactly?" I turned to look at him as I questioned. He didn't look away from the road, that was good I suppose but I saw him raise his perfectly shaped eyebrow. I wasn't intending to end up in a hospital just because this moron couldn't keep his eyes on the road. But then again he wasn't that big of a moron either.

"You hurt me, Craziness," he used the new nickname he gave me. He was comparing me to Harley Quinn and hadn't been very covert about it, actually, he told it right on my face that I was *Harley Quinn* crazy. Not that I minded. In fact, I was very much used to being called crazy by almost everyone. He continued, "you wound my big manly ego, you know? I thought you would

have already Googled everything about me by now."

Oh! That smirk of his, I was so tempted to dope smack him so badly. But then again, I wasn't eager to end up in a hospital as I had asserted earlier.

"And I thought by now you would have figured me out, Aar-Aar," I smiled on seeing him flinch at the nickname I had given him. It reminded him of 'agar-agar' which he hated the sound of, making it an act of perfect revenge for me, "just as crazy as I am, that so lazy I tend to be."

"Some lazy craziness she is," he grumbled under his breath, making me laugh.

"We are here," he suddenly announced, taking a left to drive through an open gate. Had we arrived already? I looked out of the window as we drove down the slope and entered the basement which was brightly lit.

The whole place was a giant parking area with various types of cars, hummers, bikes, and many more vehicles, standing magnificently. The light bounced off their metallic bodies, giving them a '*monster-of-the-road*' look along with elegance.

There was a door that was closed at the further end of the garage. He parked the car and got down. I followed or moreover tried to follow his lead but my ankle was killing me.

He was before me by the time I managed to close the car door and offered his hand for my help that I accepted gladly.

"All these vehicles are... just amazing," I looked around in awe.

"Most of those are mine." He was proud of them, I could tell. He carefully led me into the open glass elevator before pressing 3 on the panel. The other side of the elevator had a mirror letting me see what a mess I had been. It wasn't

one of my finest times. I looked tired and was covered in a fine sheen of sweat, my make up evaporated, half of my lipstick eaten. My dark hair was out of its place, my clothes creased. My smokey eyes smudged into complete black. I looked like a bad version of hopping black bunny.

"You sure that your brothers won't have a heart attack by looking at me?" I asked when we got out of the lift and a maid looking better than me walked past. We slowly walked through the expensive hallway decorated with contemporary paintings and artifacts.

"I doubt anything would ever scare them so easily," he reassured me, "even if you somehow manage to do that, it would be a sight to see."

I just slapped his upper arm playfully, making him laugh. The hallway opened to a huge living room with a high ceiling and a mezzanine with glass railings. The huge screen reminded me of theaters with a sound system surrounding it. At the other end, I could see the staircase with glass railings leading upstairs.

From the white sofas, two people regarded me with a cool gaze. Both of them are jaw-drop stunning and ripped. I immediately recognized one of them to be Daksh, who closed the magazine and watched me intensely. He was in a white shirt with the collar button undone paired with dress pants. A gray striped tie was resting on a briefcase beside him. He must have just returned home.

The other guy had his hands folded across his chest. His dark eyes analyzed the scene before him. His dark hair stood around an inch or two above before falling behind, giving him a windswept look. His perfectly styled dark beard could make any girl swoon at his sight. Unlike Daksh, this guy was in casual sky blue jeans and teal Henley. His ears pierced with small studs.

"Daksh," Aaryan nodded at Daksh before turning to the other guy, "Neel."

Okay, this brother was Neel.

"Meet Rynah," Aaryan showed his hands towards me dramatically, "and Rynah, these two are my elder twin brothers."

What? They didn't look like twins from any angle!

7. SAAT

I stared at the twins, giving them both an equal amount of my of observation. But nothing about them said that they were twins. The corundum must have been depicting on my features so clearly that Daksh replied to my unasked question, "Fraternal twins."

"Huh?"

"We are fraternal twins," he repeated at my mindless sounds that came out automatically. Daksh's voice was oddly velvety yet a bit husky towards the end. Like the dark silky molten chocolate with a pinch of salt to it. I had heard about twins of the same gender who don't look alike but had never seen them, until now. So it kind of slipped my mind about their existence. Hey, what can I say? Would telling that I was a technical person save me from looking like a complete idiot? To my defence, whenever the word twins came to my mind, I always visualized two cute same looking girls, not two different handsome guys.

I just nodded awkwardly when I realized that I had been staring at no one in particular, just deep in thought, might I add with a frown etched on my forehead? No doubt that I was as pink as a baby panda.

"Let's get you to the doctor," Aaryan's voice brought me back to the present as he gently led me towards the sofa where Daksh was seated, while I

hobbled my way. I was a little scared and nervous at the moment. Never had I ever been in the company of such a handsome man, let alone three.

"What happened?" Daksh came to kneel before me as Aaryan explained, "Broke her heel, twisted her ankle and dragged a pyramid of glasses down with her, can you imagine that?"

Amusement was dripping from his tone, I swear I would have punched him in the guts if he wasn't helping me out here.

"Gosh, I could be wrong and you could be worse than Luv and Kush put together," I rolled my eyes as I leaned back when I corrected myself, "No, I take that back."

"You do?" Aaryan raised his eyebrows in surprise to hear me take back the words I had been repeating like a broken tape recorder the whole night.

"Yeah," I nodded my head before adding, "You ARE worse than Luv and Kush put together."

It took a second or two for him to process what I had said before understanding dawned over his features. That was it, the laughing Buddha burst into laughter. Aaryan had been laughing almost the entire night at my expense, "Oh, that attitude you have!"

I just narrowed my eyes at him, grumbling, "Yeah. Whatever. Laughing Buddha." That was when I realized that we had company. Daksh's eyebrows shot up to his hair, a small tilt in the side of his lips while Neel looked quite amused as a smirk threatened to break out. As if on cue, my cheeks flushed red and my eyes widened a bit.

"Don't mind me, it's just that he annoys me faster than anyone else," I tried sounding casual.

One by one they started chuckling, enjoying the free show.

"Where did you find this one?" I heard Neel's voice for the first time. It was deep just like the other two but had a gentle tone to it. It went well with his personality.

"You wouldn't believe me," he replied with a tease.

"That's something that I can't disagree with, go on and tell anyway," Neel leaned over his elbows stacked over his knees.

"I followed her to the end of the world," Aaryan winked flopping on the sofa beside me. Neel threw a cushion that was beside him at Aaryan.

"You're barfing that shit as always," Neel rolled his eyes, leaning back again. I couldn't believe that they were acting like regular siblings. Hearing their reputation and seeing their initial behavior, I had thought differently. At least, it was comforting to see them act like normal humans. Daksh ignored them as he examined my ankle.

"Ouch!" I winced at the pain when he slightly turned my foot.

"Does it hurt here?" He asked, slightly pressing the left of my ankle.

"No."

"Here?" He pressed the right side of my ankle making me flinch.

"Yeah..."

"Does it hurt intolerably?" He examined that part further.

"Not like a broken bone though."

"A pain relief ointment should be sufficient then. You should be able to walk

properly in about two days. It's just a mild sprain, so just follow the R.I.C.E way. You know what's R.I.C.E, right?" Daksh asked making me nod. I wasn't new to it, that saved time. By the time Daksh had finished with his observation, Neel had already called for the butler through the intercom.

"So Rynah, what do you do?" Daksh eased onto the huge wooden teapoy before me.

"I just completed my engineering, still have a few days before joining the job. What about you guys?" I asked politely but it amused the trio. All of them had their eyebrows raised and surprise clear on their faces. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to ask that after all.

"You don't know what we do?" It was Neel who broke the silence.

"No, not really. Except for the fact that Daksh just examined my ankle, indicating that he's the doctor, I don't even know what Aaryan does," I shrugged nonchalantly, or tried to.

"Told ya, she is something else," Aaryan shook his head amused.

Daksh smiled while Aaryan smirked as he explained, "Okay, Craziness. I don't know if it's amusing me more or scaring me by the fact that you so recklessly came into a house of a stranger with more strangers but anyway, as you already know, Daksh Raivardhan is a neurosurgeon, he's such a rookie in the field that his schedule is filled for the next three years. Neel Raivardhan over there," he pointed at Neel before continuing, "He is a prosecutor turned attorney, I can say, got kicked out from the government unit. Such a poor excuse of a lawyer that he ended up being on the magazine as the most expensive lawyer in the country. Now coming to *oh-so-poor-little* me," he wriggled his eyebrows making me roll my eyes but I couldn't help but grin, "I am still trying to grab some attention with my music. You must have already heard tonight how off-key I sing. Just a struggling musician, you know, with some four to five hit albums under my belt, nothing more than what a regular

beggar earns."

"Yeah, a beggar can sing a thousand times better than you," a new voice grabbed the spotlight. The owner of the voice was clad in a classic blue colored three-piece suit with a crisp white shirt and royal blue silk tie. He looked like a Van Heusen model, lean and tall like the other three Raivardhans. His aura and attitude shouted '*Raivardhan*'. The light facial hair gave a manly edge to his handsome face. The shiny, bouncy hair of his, styled in a unique style of its own.

Unlike the other brothers, his eyes were cold blue. Intimidation screamed all over him as if it was his motto. He cast an icy gaze at me, giving me chills. He was like those proud creatures who believed to be above the rest of the world and all the others were mere insects he walked on without a care.

His voice was smooth and authoritative, and deep in bass.

"Typical Vikrant," Aaryan rolled his eyes.

"And so are you," another new voice caused me to turn my head to regard the new person. There was something different about this one, his voice was powerful yet felt like the soft silk out there. The way he walked to stand beside Vikrant, was just so surreal yet it looked natural on him.

He had a light gray suit with plaids, his crisp white shirt casually resting on his body. Never had ever any boy taken my breath away like what I felt after looking at him. Not even the other Raivardhans! And he wasn't even a boy to begin with! Everything about him screamed manly! His full beard, his dark sharp eyes, his straight posture, the way he carried himself, the way his hair was nearly tugged to his left. I instantly felt my heart pound in my chest, my eyes refusing to move away from him. I didn't want to admit it, but I think I just found myself a new crush! And as soon as he came, the carefree environment dissolved into thin air, leaving behind an awkward silence.

He regarded me with a bone-chilling stare, before his eyes hardened, his voice cold as ice on an iceberg, "You don't listen do you?"

I knew that the question wasn't directed to me, but the way he said it made me shiver unintentionally. It made me feel like an intruder here.

"Brother, she was hurt," Aaryan explained, making his uptight *brother's* dark eyes give me a head to toe check as if he was analyzing Aaryan's statement. It made me feel self-conscious about my appearance. Out of all the days, did I have to look like a Chinese crested today?

I just wanted to disappear, let the ground swallow me or the lightning strike me.

"I think I should get going," I stood up abruptly under *his* scrutinizing gaze. The sharp pain shot out causing me to wince unintentionally. I tried to keep my calm as much as possible, not wanting to humiliate myself any more than what I had.

"No, your leg!"

"Careful!"

"Take it easy, craziness."

Voices of three men echoed through the room, simultaneously. Daksh, Neel, and Aaryan had worry edged on their faces. Flushing red like a tomato, I looked up to find Vikrant with a raised eyebrow and a sarcastic smirk. But the other brother, whose name was still a mystery to me, remained unimpressed.

Right on time, the butler walked in with the first aid kit.

"Fix her up and drop her home. It must be getting late for Ms. *Craziness*," the

bossy brother who so happened to be my latest crush ordered in an impassive tone before turning on his heels and marching away. He didn't even give a second glance. And why would he even do that? To look at an axolotl? He was like a runway model, not that he needed to know to pump up his already inflated ego, and I was... well I didn't want to feel worse than I already did.

"Sorry about Viaan, he can be... stern at times," Aaryan spoke apologetically but still didn't speak ill of his brother. So, Mr. Uptight's name was Viaan, suits him though.

Daksh insisted me to sit down so that he could bandage my foot. I followed like a good little patient I was.

After spraying the pain reliever and bandaging my foot, Daksh got one of the maids to bring beige memory foam slippers.

"That must do the trick, just don't exert a lot of pressure on your ankle. Massage them twice a day and a hot water bath before going to bed. You will be fine that way," Daksh let me wear the slippers.

"Thank you so much, all of you. I will return these as soon as possible," I smiled making another set of amused expressions to shadow their faces.

"Did you think those were the only set that all of us here use in a queue after fighting tooth and nail for it all the time?" Aaryan raised his eyebrows mockingly, "then yes, craziness! We Raivardhans are so poor that we don't own at least a dozen of them with different colors and textures in our not so personal wardrobes. You better even give it back right now, it's my turn to use those horrible beige colored slippers anyway!"

He then turned to Daksh saying, "I knew you had an awful taste in fashion bro." Daksh just rolled his eyes but still was quite amused.

"Here goes the narcissist brag again," I spoke in a mumble.

"I heard that!" He exclaimed making my retort shut him up for a brief second, "It was meant to be!"

Neel busted out laughing, Daksh shook his head with a smile while Vikrant had an amused smirk and eyebrows raised.

Well, as for Aaryan, he just gave me a deadpan look, "and I thought I was bad."

It was my turn to burst out laughing. Looks like Luv and Kush were rubbing off on me.

"It just isn't your day, Aaryan, it just isn't your day," Neel patted Aaryan's shoulder before sauntering deeper into the house.

"Agreed," Daksh smirked leaning back on the sofa before resuming the flip through the magazine that Neel had been reading. Vikrant just watched the show silently before slipping back the way he came through.

"Come on, Craziness. As much I would love to see you struggle hopping your way back, the gentleman in me is shaking his head," Aaryan sighed before helping me up. My foot ached but much less than it initially did.

We walked silently to the elevator and let it take us to the down. I was happy that it wasn't an awkward silence, it was a calm and comfortable one. The elevator opened to reveal the garage, I could now see a few guards moving around inspecting the floor. They nodded at Aaryan's sight who nodded back with a poker face.

For a second I couldn't recognize him. He was so serious and intimidating all of a sudden that it reminded me of Vikrant and Viaan. Once we walked out of the huge double gates, I asked him unable to contain my curiosity, "What was that about?"

"What?" He gave me a baffled look not following my thoughts.

"That damn serious, Viaan-[wala](#)-interaction with the guards!" I explained to him.

"Oh, that," he chuckled, "I don't behave like this with everyone. I keep my circle small, just like my brothers. Only a few get to witness this side of me, so consider yourself as lucky, Craziness."

His words made a smile spread on my face. I did not doubt that all my teeth were out for display, "I'm honored, *oh great* Mr. Aar-Aar."

"Looks like you are insulting and complimenting me at the same time," he smirked before coming to stop before my aunt's house. My eyes widened at the realization. How did he know?

"How did you know that I was staying here?" I asked him surprised.

He turned to give his trade smirk, replying, "we are called *The Raivardhans* for a reason, darling. We know everything."

He winked at me before giving me a two-finger salute and turned on his heels to march back to The Raivardhan mansion in an attitude like he didn't have a care in the world.

From the corner of my eyes, I registered the door opening and a familiar face come into the view. Her tone held disbelief, "Was that? Did he just?"

"You were right, Anjali," I turned to look at the starstruck expression on my cousin's face, "All the Raivardhans are smoking hot!"

8. AATH

"Oh. My. God! You lucky bitch! You just lived the wish of millions of girls put together!" Anjali was awestruck as she playfully punched me.

"More like was dragged into the wish," I joked before casting a lookout of the glass, towards the Raivardhan mansion. Except for the few lights here and there, the mansion had been very quiet with no noticeable movements. The dim lighting of the room allowed us to see outside, of course with a little reflection of ours in the way.

"Already can't keep your eyes away from them, eh?" Anjali teased by nudging me. I chuckled, "Hey! It ain't like that and you know it quite well too."

"Yeah, yeah, that you only have eyes for Surya Kanth Nath," she smirked making me groan, "Anju..."

I grabbed a nearby pillow and smashed it onto her head. "Hey! That was uncalled for!" She took the other pillow and tried to hit me with it but I blocked her attack with mine. Our laughter had filled the room as we continued with the pillow fight.

Little did I know that on the other side of the Raivardhan mansion, our pillow fight was being watched by two pairs of amused eyes and another pair of cold eyes.

"I'm in a dilemma," Vikrant broke the icy silence between the brothers.

"About?" Viaan was still scrutinizing the scene before him that he did not see it necessary to cast Vikrant his precious gaze.

"I still can't decide if she was very dumb or that brave to talk like that to Aaryan, to us," Vikrant leaned against the desk and folded his hands across his chest. His black track pants paired up with black polo shirt, fit him snug.

"Come on guys, you know that she is an innocent girl with a personality that is real for once. At least, she is not fake," Neel removed his hands from his pockets and frowned at his brother's words.

"She's not," Viaan's deep voice filled the room again. He was still in his office attire, not having enough time from his work to change into his pajamas. The other two brothers waiting for him to complete his point. He slowly loosened his tie and pulled it out, "She is the most clever of the gold diggers I've met till the date. She's smart enough to hide behind the mask of dumbness and cunning enough to pretend to be innocent. Just one meeting and she already caused all of you to let your guards down, taking her to be as docile and harmless."

"But we must admit, she was entertaining," Vikrant smirked.

"Maybe. Just don't trust anyone outside our close circle. You can't keep a scorpion in your vicinity without having the fear of being stung. And keep her out of our house," with that said Viaan turned and left the room, leaving Vikrant and Neel in darkness, at the mercy of lights from outside. The remaining two Raivardhan brothers continued to watch the little fun I and Anjali were having.

The next day, I didn't have a panic attack like I usually did whenever I wake up in a new place. After all, Anjali was the one who woke me up gently.

We had a brunch, Uncle Aadarsh, Luv and Kush had taken a day off so that they could provide better hospitality to their guests, in a sense us.

A lot of talks happened over the brunch, along with the talk came Luv's and Kush's nonsense. Those baboons didn't spare anyone. Not even their parents...

"The only reason why you are in a hurry to get me married is that once I'm gone, you can secretly try my new limited edition underwear collection," Luv remarked thoughtfully to Uncle Aadarsh. Hearing Luv's comment Anjali choked on her saliva.

"Yeah, that's what is left for me to do. Try a size too small and die out of lack of blood supply in my lower region," Uncle Aadarsh deadpanned. Anjali hadn't recovered from the first choke yet and here she choked again on some water.

"Hey!" Luv protested but everyone was already laughing their minds off.

"That's disgusting Luv, even for you," Aunt Lasika shook her head pretending to be disappointed.

"Hey! Not my fault when my dad was fascinated by the same collection in the Jockey store, only that he was not able to find his size!" Luv threw his hands in the air as Kush started snorting in laughter.

"Yeah dad, I still remember you trying to sneak my cake away," Kush spoke in between his laughter.

"That was cake and this is my imbecile son's dumb collection of underwear we are talking about, how in the hell can they be related?" Uncle Aadarsh exclaimed incredulously.

Kush clicked his tongue, "That's the catch. When you don't spare a simple

cake, you don't spare anything, not even undergarments."

Uncle just continued to give him a blunt stare not making out much of his son's side of the argument.

"Stop it, you disgusting guys! People are trying to eat here, and the last thing we want to hear is an underwear talk," Anjali snapped after choking for the third time in the row.

Thanks to Daksh and the pain reliever, my ankle was bearable. I was able to walk like a regular human. Though I had an urge to revisit the Raivardhan mansion, I avoided doing so to maintain my dignity. I didn't want to be seen as a desperate female who had lost all her dignity and drop at the place where she least belonged. Wouldn't want to have that now, would I?

After brunch, we headed to the Batra family's new farmhouse. It was on the outskirts of the city. They had a few horses in a stable, around some ten cows and a whole herd of sheep grazing on the pasture. On a small pond at a corner, few ducks quacked. The shrubs of wild Indian flowers ran around the perimeter of the pond. It was such a pretty sight to see.

A cozy wooden cottage rested in the middle of the property. We were spending the day there, enjoying the picnic. I *tried* to learn horse riding, the keyword being '*tried*'. The horses seemed to have a thing against me. They dropped me down twice leaving me with a painful back, kicked Luv and Kush who tried to hold them while I tried to hop on them, and ran around wild like they just escaped a prison. None of the horses let me sit on them, not even one! And it broke my heart because horses were my favorite animal. I have had always dreamt of riding one. Like forever.

"See, you are so horrible that even these poor creatures fear you, they have the sixth sense you know?" Kush shook his head as he came to stand on my one side.

"Poor animals, I just hope they don't die of heart attack at the end of the day," Luv said from the other side of mine.

"Really? Am I that horrible?" I could feel my bottom lip quiver as my eyes started to fill with unshed tears.

"Yeah," Luv nodded seriously.

"Absolutely," Kush agreed.

"Mommy," I let out a loud sob as I walked in a random direction with a broken heart.

Anjali came halfway with a pissed off look. She gently supported my frame with her delicate hands and glared at her brothers, "Idiots."

And then she led me towards the female population of the group.

It took the rest of the day for everyone in consoling me and scolding Luv and Kush. Only after that, the troublemakers retained themselves from causing any more havoc.

In the evening we had a barbecue party and danced and danced before finally heading back to Anjali's house. The next day was partially spent getting over the toll of the previous day. Everyone was tired beyond expectation. Ritika who couldn't keep her eyes open, she ended up dropping her face into her food and started snoring. Luv and Kush were so tired that they resorted to their smirks than laughing or even taking a pic of Ritika.

Anjali hadn't got down yet, and neither would have I if it wasn't for my mom to wake me up so early. A suitor was up for a visit and my mom didn't want me to miss even this opportunity and end up marrying me to the *pedophile* as Aunt Lasika puts it. According to my mom, this guy was probably the best suitor I could ever get, of course, given that I didn't miss this chance. It was

my luck that the girl they were nearby to see, had found another suitor, so they were ready to see any other girl in the surroundings, who were available. So, it was really on very short notice.

I was still yawning when I was pushed into the nearest room and my mom and her sister worked on me. My makeup, my clothing everything had been done and I was just sitting in a corner and dozing off a bit when Anjali finally decided to get downstairs.

She was still in her pajamas, with a nest for her hair. She looked around a bit at the hustle and the bustle and asked, "what am I missing here?"

"Everything," was all I replied and let my eyes close for a little bit more. The next time I jerked awake, people were rushing the left out work all around the place. I wiped the corner of my mouth to find saliva drooling out. I was hungry, my stomach was rumbling. And the off-white Anarkali dress I was made to wear was grand enough to feel itchy everywhere...

"Good thing you woke up, those people are nearby," Anjali commented, placing a tray of laddoos on the table beside me. Oh my gosh! I loved the laddoos!

I reached for the nearest one only to get my hand slapped away, "ouch! That hurt!"

"Good. These are for the guests, you could have them later," Anjali said without casting a glance at me. She was busy arranging the table with eatables.

"Can't I at least have one of them?" I gave her my best puppy eyes, "I am really hungry."

Her eyes softened a bit before placing a laddoo before me, "You ain't getting more than this." Placing another laddoo over my hand she winked before

walking away. I had a toothy grin etched on my lips. I loved my cousin!

I hogged the two laddoos and was about to steal another one from the tray when Kush announced, "they are here!"

I don't know from where my mom appeared right out of the thin air, grabbed hold of me and dragged me into the nearest room, all along she was scolding me for dirtying my hands and face. I didn't realize that the sweet sticky oil from laddoos had smeared across my lips and a part of the cheek, "I don't get it, how in the hell did you eat that everything has spread over your cheek? You are grown up Rynah, yet there is no difference between yourself and a five-year-old," her rambling went on as she cleaned my face and only stopped when the ringing of doorbell boomed through the air. She called Anjali in to retouch my makeup as she walked out to meet the suitor and his family.

I felt the anxiety seep in. My hands started to tremble a bit as my feet turned cold.

Anjali seemed to understand what I was going through because she placed her hands on my shoulders giving them a gentle squeeze.

"I'm scared," I whispered.

"It will be fine. I bet he is an amazing guy, don't worry."

"I am more scared that he will reject me..." I trailed off.

"He will be a fool if he did."

I gave Anjali a tiny smile for her encouraging words, which she replied by her stunning one. She was a wonderful girl, inside and out. And I was lucky to have her as my cousin.

We waited in silence, letting my thumping heart calm down a bit before we

were called out, only to be all nervous again...

Timidly I walked out, where I met my mom who handed over a tray of teacups to me. I had no other option but to carry that over to the guests. I was glad that my nervousness wasn't displaying on the outside like it usually did in the form of shivering. And that was how I jinxed myself.

Sitting on the L-shaped sofa were five people. A man and a lady in their late forties, wearing traditional Indian wear. A girl who looked like she was in her high school, in a blue frock, and two men who were in their mid or even in the late twenties, both formally dressed. I found one of the guys to be cute. The other one was rather plain. It was clear, the man and the lady in the forties were the suitor's parents and the little girl must have been his sister. But I wasn't sure about who was the suitor among the two guys and what was his relationship with the other guy? They could be brothers, cousins, friends or even broker and client. Looking at the fact that he looked different, I take it he wasn't blood related, but I wasn't sure.

Out of the Indian tradition, I moved to every one of them to serve them tea, greeting and smiling nervously at each of them. My hands were slightly shaking when I stood before the suitor's parents, causing the teacups to make a vibrating sound but they were polite enough not to comment about it.

"That's my son, Ravi," the suitor's dad informed when I was serving the plain looking guy. My hands were full on shaking now, causing mini tsunamis to appear in the teacups. A bit of tea fell on the tray too, but Ravi was oblivious to it. I felt relief but also slight disappointment that he wasn't the other guy. I had hoped it to be the other guy, though I had an idea that it wouldn't be. But couldn't a girl hope? Ravi couldn't seem to look away or break the eye contact. He was fine and all, not as cute as the guy sitting next to him and not at all anywhere close to any of the Raivardhan brothers. But I was at peace because in case he agreed, I wouldn't have to marry Surya Kanth Nath...

"And he is from the mediating agency," Ravi's dad added when I moved

forward to serve the tea to the cute guy who just smiled in acknowledgment. See, I knew it that he was the wasn't blood related! He was the broker.

I moved away to sit on the single sofa after serving everyone, letting them have a proper look at me. Relieved that I didn't drop the hot tea over anyone and make a fool out of myself. This was how arranged marriages happened in India, this was how everyone evaluated the girl before the marriage.

Shyly, I glanced towards Ravi to find him looking at me, but that didn't fail me to notice the broker guy gaping at something behind me. What was he being awestruck by?

"Rynah betah, you may go in," my dad spoke from the side. Oh my gosh! My dad was here, and I didn't see him? I had been so anxious as I concentrated over the guests that I didn't take note of my father who was sitting by the TV. I could feel my cheeks flush.

I nodded in acknowledgment and got up, giving one last glance towards Ravi. Again, not failing to notice the broker guy staring behind me. I turned around only to find Anjali standing a few feet away from me, ready to take me back inside.

Everything clicked in its place as I smiled toothily at her. Had to agree that she looked rather lovely in the blue kurta. She just gave me a *you-are-weird* look and ushered me inside.

"Looks like someone has an admirer," I sang as soon as we were out of the earshot.

"I saw, Ravi couldn't keep his eyes off you," she smiled making me roll my eyes.

"I wasn't talking about Ravi."

"Then?"

"The person beside him did show a great interest in someone here," I sang again as I fell back on the bed.

"No..." She frowned in disbelief.

"Oh yes," I was enjoying teasing her.

"Don't joke around, Rynah," I could see her becoming nervous.

"What would you do if he came to talk to you?" I asked her cheekily.

"I... I..." She was at the loss of words before she recovered immediately and completed, "I would smack him in the face."

Hearing her words I ended up roaring in laughter, while she tried shushing me. Typical Anjali.

"Smack who in the face?" We turned around to find Luv by the door.

"Of course, who else? Her idiotic brothers," Anjali smiled at my words. Luv just raised his eyebrow but didn't comment about it.

"Why are you here?" Anjali asked the question that had started to bother me.

"Those people left and our parents told me to inform you two," he shrugged making me and Anjali exchange looks.

"What?" Luv asked confused.

"How can we believe you?" Anjali placed her hands over her hips.

"That you are telling the truth?" I added folding my hands across my chest.

"Why can't you two believe me that I am here without any ulterior motive? By the way, I was strictly instructed to not cause any waggishness," he justified before turning around to leave. Anjali and I gagged at his words before bursting into full on laughter.

"Whatever," he grumbled before walking out.

Later that evening, I received a reminder from the office I was supposed to join from the next day. I had to be present over there sharp at nine with the appointment letter. I was already looking forward to it.

I was so happy that I didn't even mind Luv's and Kush's teasing. I just smiled and bore with them.

At last, it was time to get back home. To convey goodbyes to each other, our parents walked to the car, while I and Anjali gave each other a tight hug.

"Gosh, I miss you already," I breathed in her ear.

"You are closer to me than Tapasya."

"And you to me, than Ritika," I smiled.

"I heard that," came Ritika's remark making both me and Anjali roll our eyes.

"Take care," Anjali smiled as I and Ritika climbed into the backseat of our old white Maruti Zen. Waving at the Batra family, my dad started the engine and slowly drove down the lane. I turned around to take a good look at the Raivardhan mansion for one last time knowing that I would never be getting into that house again nor was I going to be able to meet any of them anytime soon. The streetlights did no justice to the structural beauty but still, I knew what it was like to be inside.

I sat back straight, exhaling a sigh and letting a knot to settle in my stomach.

I didn't want to leave, not yet at least but nothing else could be done. Nothing else was meant to be.

Our paths were different, they weren't going to cross over again. I could only dream of them and their lifestyle, like how a regular hen could dream of a peacock, but not have him.

Only if I had known that fate worked in weird ways.

9. NAU

"Hello! I'm Rynah Kundra!" I

smiled but the smile looked very lousy.

"Umm..." I licked my lips and straightened my shirt before trying again, "Hey! I'm Rynah!" But this time the smile was too wide and gave me an amateurish look, my raised hand was left hanging in the air.

"Okay, that will be awkward Rynah," I wiped my sweaty hands over my pencil skirt and smiled just a little, "Hi! My name is Rynah-" I trailed off when I noticed the lady three sinks down from me was washing her hands, the only problem was that she wasn't exactly washing her hands. She let the water flow as she stared at me having my rehearsal in front of the washroom mirror. I felt my cheeks flush. She stared down at me for a minute and then back up.

I smiled at her politely only to have her close the tap before rushing out of the washroom. I wouldn't be surprised if she took me to be a deranged female in the washroom. That was when I looked down and noticed my idiocy! I had worn my skirt inside out, and now it looked like I had worn a skirt for the first time in my life...

I was such a klutz!

I looked around the washroom, happy to see no one else was present to witness that stupidity of mine. I rushed towards the first cubicle only to find it engaged. Sighing in frustration, I checked the other two to find them

occupied too. A glance at my watch and it was almost time to meet my new boss!

I have to hurry... I cannot be late on the very first day of my job! And I CANNOT go around looking like this!

Either I was really brave or really stupid because I had removed my skirt right outside the cubicles and was standing only in my shirt and undies while I rushed to turn it inside out with trembling hands. If someone walked in on me at this moment, I would die out of embarrassment.

"Almost done! Almost done!" I kept chanting as my hands shivered and ruined the majority of the effort. But somehow I turned the inside back inside and was ready to wear it when the door of a cubicle opened and a girl walked out to give me a shocked look. I stood back straight, already dying out of embarrassment. She looked at the skirt in my hand and then at me. I instantly became tomato red. Immediately, rushing into the cubicle she had come out from, I put on my skirt. Coming out of the cubicle, I found the same girl still washing her hands.

"It's cold here isn't it?" My lame save made me want to facepalm. It was the middle of the summer, burning with forty degree Celsius! And we were in Hyderabad, it was always damn hot here! She just kept staring at me like I was crazy. I wasn't called Crazy or Craziness for no reason...

"I better get out!" I quickly grabbed my bag up and rushed towards the door as she continued to stare at me.

Oh shit! I forgot my appointment letter by the sink!

I turned back around and picked the letter before rushing back out, while the girl was still trying to understand what was happening.

Someone, kill me now!

I walked out of the washroom, just to go behind a gigantic pillar to bang my head on it, "Why me god? Why me?"

I hit it once again hoping that doing it twice would reverse what I had done. Or was it thrice?

"Am I seeing it right? Is that you Ms. Kundra?" A voice stopped me from further banging my head against the pillar, instead, I cringed unintentionally. I turned around to see a familiar person. The suit looked a size or two big for him, just to fit in his protruding belly. A black beret hat covered the vertex baldness. His smile was stretched on his lips making it look like if it stretched a millimeter more, his lips would tear.

"Oh! It truly is you! What a pleasant surprise!" He laughed his peculiar laugh making me cringe internally.

"Mr. Surya Kanth Nath. How are you?" I asked politely, my mother had taught me to behave politely, no matter how much I was disgusted with that person.

"I'm fine, darling, how about you?" I cringed again at his endearment but forced a smile, "I'm fine."

I didn't want to continue the conversation but Mr. Nath had other thoughts. He started again, "I was just passing from here when I caught sight of you. Is this where you will be working?"

I opened my mouth to answer but he didn't wait for my reply and continued, "It's a good company, always delivering on time. I have been one of their clients for a while. By the way, we have given another project to them. So, my visits might turn out to be quite frequent here. In that sense, we can meet each other regularly and get to know each other well," I stared at him as he started to talk continuously. I had started to tune off his talk when his words suddenly caught my attention again, "Your parents might be already

considering my proposal, so, it's safe to assume that we will be married soon. I ain't a proposal to be turned down."

Wait! What was he thinking himself to be again?

"Hold on, Mr. Nath. It's 9 am already. I have a meeting with my boss. We'll catch up later?" I had to excuse myself else I would go insane.

"Sure, sure. Just tell me one thing," his eyes now held an intensity, "no other proposal came your way right? Good enough to be considered?"

It gave me goosebumps by the way he asked that.

"Er... ac-actually... " Again he didn't let me finish as he completed it for me, "someone came to see you," and it wasn't a question.

The seriousness on his face was scaring me but then he just smiled, "It's absolutely fine with me. You do deserve a good husband, of your level. If you are happy, it makes me happy. Have a great day, Ms. Kundra. See you again."

I felt at ease as he walked away, letting me catch a breath. For a moment he had freaked me out completely. But I'm glad that he doesn't feel offended by it. It should be good as long as no hard feelings resided, right?

I walked to the reception for the second time, "Hi again! I'm Rynah, and here is my appointment letter."

The lady in charge of the newcomers hadn't arrived before, so they had asked me to wait, till she arrived. I read her name tag to be 'Shreya Sethi'. Shreya took my letter, quickly scanning it before looking at me, "Follow me, Rynah."

She walked out of the reception area and into the elevator. We remained

silent throughout the way. Shreya stopped behind a guy who was looking over another person's shoulder at something on the screen and said, "Anand, this is Rynah Kundra. She's joining the designing team from today."

Anand turned around to look at me. He didn't look like a very friendly being. He had a scowl etched on his face as he examined me. He was in his late thirties or early forties.

"You are in the developing team at the moment. The Designing team is occupied in a project that is in the middle. After the project is over, you will join us," he stated before looking at Shreya, "take her to the development department."

Shreya just looked at him bewildered before nodding and turning around, "follow me, Rynah."

I ran to catch up with her.

"Don't mind him, he's always not so [Anand](#)," Shreya rolled her eyes as we got into the elevator for the second time. I didn't comment. This time we stopped on the tenth floor.

We walked in silence towards the cabin of the development department head. Knocking twice on the door, Shreya entered when a muffled 'come in' was heard, "Anand sent the new recruitee here."

The older lady who was sitting behind the table groaned, "not again! He has been doing that for three times in a row now! Who does he think he is?"

"I don't know what he's trying to do. I'm just following what is been told to me," Shreya shrugged. The older lady turned to me with polite eyes, "what's your name, dear?"

"Rynah Kundra, madam," I gave her a bright smile.

"Nice name, Rynah. I'm Susan D'Souza, head of the development department," she paused there to get out of her seat, "You getting recruited for the design team implies that you must be really good. Unfortunately, our designing department head has been having his head stuck in clouds lately, not wanting to come back down."

She had a frown etched on her face but recomposed herself as she continued, "I shall talk to the CEO and other board members regarding this matter and make sure you get back in your rightful position. Till that matter can be taken care of, you expose yourself to the office environment and help us a little with the development. I am not going to put a regular workload over you, knowing that you will be shifting back to your department soon. Shreya will show you the necessary areas of this company and introduce you to your temporary team leader. Welcome to our little department."

She smiled at me making me respond to her with another smile and a '*thank you*'. She looked at Shreya who nodded and lead me out once again.

I was shown around the office, the different rooms, departments, and other important areas. The cafeteria was on the ground floor and every department had different lunch hours. Soon, I was led back to the development floor and introduced to the team lead, Prem Verma. Prema was a charismatic young man who just had a few more years of experience than me. He was really smart to see, and a rather adorable guy.

"So Rynah, how did you find the office?" He asked randomly when Shreya left me in his care as he led me towards the team room.

"It's good, apart from the fact that I remember none of the areas or their routes, it's fine," I smiled looking forward.

He chuckled, "I can relate. It's will take a while but you will get adjusted soon enough."

"I am hoping."

"By the way, this is the team room, where team meetings and discussions go around. Almost every team has some allotted time to access this room. Now, it's our time," he winked as he opened the door for me and allowed me to get in. I blushed as I walked in.

There was a long table with several chairs placed around it before a projector, a graffiti art saying '*time flies*' laid beautifully across the plain wall to the left of the projector.

Colorful paper Planes were hung from the ceiling as a contemporary show stand stood magnetically on the end of the room beside a water dispenser. Few lights illuminated quotes kept on a shelf. The red and black checkered floor spread across the room.

Few of the people sitting at the table looked up to see me, others didn't even bother and continued working on their laptops.

"Guys! This is Rynah. She has been temporarily placed in our team. I need you guys to be cooperative with her and help her get used to the working around here," Prem announced grabbing everybody's attention.

"You are that recruitee who was supposed to be in the designing team, right?" A geeky looking man pushed his glasses over the bridge of his nose.

"Um... if you say like that... yeah," I shifted my weight on the other foot.

"What did you do to be kicked out of that department even before you official join it?" I turned to look at a well dressed lady around my age enter the room. She looked like a diva, holding her purse in one hand and a *cafe coffee day* cup in another.

"Jaspreet, behave," Prem warned making her roll her eyes before she

clattered her heel against the floor while walking and took the nearest seat.

"Sorry about her, she's doesn't have any filter," Prem apologized.

"Doesn't matter much, all the high schoolers are that way. Takes some time for them to mature," I smiled innocently as I saw Prem's eyes widen a bit as amusement took over features.

I turned around to find the geeky guy and few others trying not to laugh and Jaspreet gaping at my words, "Excuse me!"

She was about to start something which I avoided by turning back to Prem and asking, "Is there a meeting going to take place now?"

"Ah, yes! We've got the first part of the project to be coded. They will be sending us the documentation at any moment now. Mrs. D'Souza strictly explained to me to keep the load less on you, can understand why," Prem nodded as he headed towards the head of the table. A peon dropped by handing Prem a sealed package.

I took my seat three chairs away from a scowling Jaspreet.

Prem stood before us as he flashed a bright smile, "Let's begin."

It had been a few days since I started working in the development department. The workload was peaceful and the only thing I had to do was code. Except for Jaspreet, everyone in the team was polite and friendly. Especially Prem, he regularly kept checking on my progress. It wasn't wrong to say that they were impressed by my work. I was a decent developer already, finishing my assigned tasks twice as fast as others. So, I was regularly given new tasks.

Even now, I was so concentrated over my screen that I didn't notice a figure looming behind me.

"Maybe you should try giving the command line arguments," a smooth velvety voice floated through the air to reach my ears.

"Yeah," I was frowning at the screen, my brain still a little slow at processing. But it just took two more seconds for it realize what just happened. Reflexively, I jumped in my place, my eyes wide as I turned to see the person who nearly gave me a heart attack. My hand automatically reaching over to the place where my heart was thumping furiously.

"You always manage to amuse me, Craziness. You will leave me behind if you entered the entertainment world," a smirking Aaryan leaned over the side of my table. He was in the formal gray dress pants with a navy blue blazer over a black plain t-shirt. A black chunky cable knit scarf stylishly rolled around his neck. He looked hot as usual. I glanced around the office to find giggling girls who frequently stared in his way but still stayed at their seats, miraculously. And the guys were busy watching the free show with great interest.

"Oh my gosh! Don't you ever do that again!" I stood up looking around at the curious eyes before turning back to ask him softly, "What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"I guess, it's your lunch hour in about..." Aaryan ignored my questions as he looked at my schedule before looking at his watch, "now."

The short siren went off indicating the department lunch hour.

"Come on, craziness. We have a lot to catch up and I need to have something for lunch before being served as a meal for some sharks," his voice went low as he cast a wary glance at Jaspreet who was giving him a suggestive look while she twirled her hair.

Without waiting for my response, Aaryan grabbed my hand as he walked towards the elevator. His guards following short.

Once in the elevator, I asked him again, "What are you doing here?"

He gave a playful pout as he placed his hand over his chest, "I am hurt, Craziness. Is this how you treat your friends?"

I rolled my eyes, "That is exactly how I treat my close friends. No walls or barrier, everything out in open. No sugar coating or lies."

"In that sense, I'm honored." He bowed a bit, impressed.

"Now, care to answer my questions?"

"Since you disappeared without a goodbye, I'd sent search parties to hunt you down. And when they finally told me about your location, I didn't see any reason to hold back. So, here I am!" The elevator pinged open as we walked out while I was gaping at his words.

"No... You wouldn't," I finally managed to get my disbelief out of my lips.

"Why wouldn't I?" He challenged as he smirked but I could see the sparkles of mischievousness in his eyes. The devil was definitely playing at something.

"Aaryan, I'm leaving," a familiar silky yet powerful voice spoke making both Aaryan and me look towards its owner.

There, clad in a three-piece black suit with a crisp white shirt and a white silk tie, stood Viaan, looking like a runway model.

Seriousness engraved on his face as his cold brown eyes regarded me... coldly?

"Go ahead bro, I'll catch you up later," Aaryan waved at him.

"Good day, Mr. Raivardhan," I nodded politely at Viaan. My stomach all of a sudden became a butterfly park at his sight.

"I would have preferred you to follow the instructions for once. Hope you remember about our talk," Viaan ignored my greeting and continued to talk to Aaryan. How rude! Why did he have to be so handsome and be such a dickhead?

"Yeah... I do," Aaryan replied a bit uncomfortably shooting a glance quickly in my way but didn't say anything to his elder brother.

"Then, I shall see you at home," with that Viaan put on his dark aviator and headed out without another glance in our direction.

"Does your brother always has a stick up his ass?" I wondered out loud.

"Sorry about that, it's just that he has trust issues. But once you are in his inner circle, you will know there is no man better than him," there you go, one Raivardhan covering for the other. Classic. But it also impressed me to see the respect and trust they had for each other.

"At least I know that your brother wouldn't have agreed to accompany you to hunt me down. Care to explain his presence?" I turned to give Aaryan a smug smile as he shook his head in amusement.

"Viaan just bought more than half of the company's share," Aaryan gave a lopsided grin.

"What?" The heights of my surprise just blew up to a different level.

"Lunch, craziness. I'll explain everything to you over lunch," Aaryan winked as he started walking towards the entrance with me.

What was going on in my life?

10. DUS

I gently swirled the smoothie with my straw as I waited for Aaryan to start explaining. We were in an elegant restaurant of a five-star hotel, inside a private cabin with a display of lush greenery and a mini pond. Away from any peering eyes.

Aaryan elegantly cut a piece of steak using a knife and fork before putting it into his mouth. The napkin put around his neck to avoid any accidental stains.

"So..." I cleared my throat hinting him about his promise.

"Oh, yeah!" He placed his cutlery on his plate as he sat back, "Viaan had been interested in that company for months now. Finally, when they were ready to let him buy the shares, with the hope of his investment in the same, they gave him a call about a week ago. Everything was arranged, the meeting was fixed. Neel went through the contract and completed the legal procedures. Vikrant was supposed to accompany Viaan but an urgent matter in the Mumbai business called for his attention. So, here I am with my brother." He paused there to give a dramatic pause before sipping some water.

"Okay," I nodded understandingly and encouraging him to continue.

"We were here by nine, that was when I saw you rushing inside. Our luck! After finishing the meeting," he raised his finger before correcting himself,

"actually, I ran from there, through halfway. I couldn't take it anymore. So, I headed to the receptionist and asked for a particular 'Rynah Kundra' and came down to say hello! That's it, the end of the story. Do I have anything else to explain, your honor?" He smirked before taking a sip of his black tea.

"No Aar-Aar, you may not. You are exempted from the law. You did come out with the truth," I waved my hand in the air dismissively.

We both ended up laughing at it. We talked for some more time as we enjoyed the lunch until I realized that my break was about to end. After so many days, I had enjoyed my lunch break again.

We were walking out of the restaurant when my phone began to ring. *Faded song by Alan Walker* was getting louder and louder till I answered the call.

"Hello, Rynah!" It was my mother and she sounded beatific.

"Hi! Ma, what's up?" I asked casually casting a look at Aaryan who stood on the side looking around.

"I've some good news, honey! Ravi and his family have sent a marriage proposal! They like you," my mom shrieked delightedly.

I was shocked for a second before an unexpected laugh left my lips. They didn't reject! They didn't me like others! I don't have to marry Surya Kanth Nath now!

"Really?" I laughed in joy and disbelief.

"Yes, really really," I could hear the happiness in her voice, "Come back home soon, we need to make the arrangements for the possible engagement."

"Yeah, I will," I smiled at no one in particular as I ended the call.

"Looks like you received some great news," Aaryan commented with a smile.

"Yeah," I sighed feeling better, "My wedding is getting fixed, probably."

He gave me a surprised look, "You are getting married?"

"Not yet, the guy who came to see me a few days ago finally sent his proposal. They might come to discuss the engagement later today, my mom called me home early," I smiled at him.

"That's great news! I am happy for you," Aaryan gave me one of those charming smiles, "I shall pray that everything goes well with your new life."

I couldn't wipe off the grin from my face as we walked to his car and he drove me back to my office.

We chatted animatedly through the ride. Aaryan was already teasing me with Ravi, saying how I will end up freaking him out on our marriage day.

Stopping by my office, he got down to walk me to the door.

"You know you didn't have to do that," I turned to look at him. He leaned forward to whisper in my ear, "I know, but couldn't help myself. Get ready to be worshiped by the queen bitches. I am dying to see the awkwardness that shall drift in the office after today."

I nudged him away as he laughed. Rolling my eyes, I playfully threatened him, "I will hunt you down and push you into their arms if something like that happens."

Mischievousness sparkled in his eyes as he opened his arms wide and let me stare at him with saucer eyes, "What are you doing?"

"Come on babe, don't be so shy. Everyone knows we are together," he announced loudly by giving me an unexpected hug.

"What the-" my words were muffled by his chest as he swayed us a little for

show. His expensive cologne filled my windpipe as I tried to push him away but he wouldn't budge.

"I can't breathe!" I gave a muffled shout making him chuckle as he let go off me. I breathed raggedly as I gave him a pointed look.

"What was that about?"

He just snickered, "You will find out about it soon."

With a wink, he wore his shades and with a smile and a wave, he headed back to his car. I stood there till he drove down the lane before turning to enter the building only to find every single pair of eyes staring at me.

"What?" I couldn't help but ask, making everyone snap back to reality and resume whatever they were doing.

A *café coffee day* parcel landed on my desk with a light thud, it still managed to make me jump a bit in fright. I looked up to find Jaspreet giving me a sickly sweet smile as if we have been friends for a long time.

"It's such a tiring day, that's why I thought I'll get some coffee for you. You must be tired," she pushed my neatly arranged objects on the desk to a corner as she sat on the newly created space.

"Wait! What's going on?" I looked around to see that everyone was looking towards us. Even Prem had paused instructing the new developer and looked at us.

"Why? I am just extending my hand towards you in friendship! By the way, I'm so sorry for the all those things I had done, I was having a bad phase of my life..." She made a sad face as she completed her sentence. I was left

completely speechless. What was I supposed to say or even think of this?

I looked around for a second, seeing everyone watching whatever was going on here.

"Okay..." I trailed off not knowing how to continue.

"I have always liked you from the time I first met you! I knew you are a very talented girl," I wanted to sing '*liar, liar pants on fire*' at her words but I didn't.

"Thanks...?" What even was going on around here?

"By the way, I didn't know you knew *The Raivardhans*," oh okay, I think I knew where she was going now. The purpose of her to suddenly turn so sweet and nice towards me. Just as Aaryan had said, '*get ready to be worshiped by the queen bitches.*'

I folded my hands across my chest as I dared her to continue by saying, "So?"

"It's... it's just that... You know... I just didn't know," she tried smiling but her composure kept breaking in between. She was just tolerating me, not that she miraculously had a change of heart.

"Next time, I'll remember to put a label over my forehead telling '*I know The Raivardhans*' wherever I go," I smiled innocently at her as I witnessed her eyes narrow a bit but the smile forced on her face was priceless to see.

She just forced a giggle like I had made a joke, my smile widened.

"I have a task to complete, bye!" I sang the last word as I wriggled my fingers at her face before turning back towards the computer screen. I felt her get down the table and march away. I swear I could even hear her teeth grinding before she left.

I was full on simpering as I took the coffee cup and sipped through it. I must admit, she did have a pretty decent taste in coffee.

By the end of the evening, I was burned out. I shut my laptop as I gathered my things and prepared to leave.

"Hey! Ms. Raivardhan-connection! How did your day go?" I felt Prem slightly clap over my shoulder.

"What?" I gave him a surprised look.

"Now, don't act like you don't know what I am talking about," Prem playfully scolded me. How did he know? He wasn't even there when Aaryan had dropped by. He was busy submitting the first half of the code to Mrs. D'Souza. And their meetings usually lasted forever.

"How did you know?" I asked him accusingly.

"Why only me? The entire office knows! People saw you and Mr. Raivardhan together. Some are even more outrageous to say that you both are dating!" We walked towards the elevator as I heard him say what he had heard.

Aaryan had really done it this time. He successfully caused drama and must be laughing his ass off at the moment.

"Prem, it's nothing—" I was cut off as people started to crowd around.

Many of them whispering within themselves, "She has the Raivardhan-connections."

Some even gossiping about how I and Aaryan went out on a lunch date and all that crap.

"I think I will be having a headache today," I grumbled to myself quickly getting into the elevator along with Prem, "And going to kick the ass of a

particular Raivardhan."

I was thanking God that there was only room for two more in the crowded elevator. At least these people had no idea about anything. We quickly got off the elevator, not exchanging another word. I was grateful that Prem didn't raise the topic again. From the corner of the eye, I found Shreya stopping her work to look at me.

I pretended not to notice as I rushed out of the office.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Rynah?" Prem's voice floated through the air as I quickly replied with a wave over my shoulder, "Yeah, sure. Bye!"

And I didn't waste any more time there. I rushed back home already thinking of how to sort the mess that Aaryan had created. I swear I was going to kill that idiotic rock star!

The evening went in a blur as Ravi's family came to have a complete talk about the rituals and marriage. Anjali, Mayank, and Prerna had accompanied me for moral supporting.

They were all very happy that my life had finally headed to a smoother path. The official engagement date was set, while I had been unofficially engaged to Ravi that very night. Just a little ring exchange scene in the presence of our families and close friends. The official one was going to be on the fortnight of the next month. And the marriage was going to be six months after that.

Ravi was a sweet guy. And caring too. I knew that when he sent me a bouquet through his parents. He wasn't as well off as Mr. Surya Kanth Nath but he's wasn't as bad as the others either. It was safe to say I wasn't ecstatic but at least I was satisfied.

Me, Prerna, Anjali, and Mayank had our little fun time. My life was perfectly normal. I had a good job, good colleagues, great family and friends, and now

a sweet and caring fiancé! Like an actual fiancé, unlike Mr. Surya Kanth Nath. Nothing more I could ask for.

But then, how can my life digest the peacefulness around it?

Just a few days after the *official* engagement date was fixed, I received an email from Mrs. D'Souza telling me that I was shifting back to the designing team. I now had to report to Anand, the head of the designing department.

It was fine, right? But no, I didn't even have the slightest idea about what was going to happen.

The next day when I arrived at the office, everyone was talking in small groups. Since I had a change in the department, everything was new to me.

I looked at a scowling Anand who was, in fact, staring at nothing in particular. I just wanted to avoid him completely but hadn't I have to report to him. Why couldn't he be kind and polite like Mrs. D'Souza?

I timidly walked up to him and greeted him, "Good morning, sir. I'm Rynah Kundra. I was asked to report to you."

He just dismissed me saying, "Yeah yeah, I know. Meet Shahdab, he's your team leader."

And he was out of my air. Why was he like that?

"Hey, you must be Rynah?" I looked at the girl who was standing on my right the entire time I spoke to Anand.

"Yeah," I gave her a small smile.

"I'm Kavya Murlidhar. A part of the designing team. I'll introduce you to Shahdab," she smiled, she was such a kind soul!

"Thank you! That would be lovely." I already liked her.

"By the way Kavya, what's going on here?" I looked at the people who were still gossiping.

"The new boss is here. And to say that he wasn't impressed would be an understatement," we started to walk as she continued, "he's holding a meeting and ordered everyone to be present there at 9:30 dot. He will be officially introduced, along with new rules maybe and changes that might happen."

Kavya shrugged as we entered the elevator. It was almost 9:30 and everyone was gathering in the conference hall. The seats were all occupied, the remaining people were standing scattered around. The crowd was only increasing as the minutes passed.

At last, the door near the podium opened as an older lady in formal office wear stepped in followed by the CEO of the company, the board members and finally, *he* did.

I had an idea that he would be here, it was just, I wasn't expecting him to be here this soon. Anyways he was here, the man who caused butterflies to grow wings like an eagle and soar the depths of my stomach, the man whose one look could make the entire female population present here to swoon and faint, the man who always had a stick up his ass, yet the man who I crushed upon even after getting my marriage fixed. I had no doubt that even happily married wives would cheat over their husbands just for him, that man was named Viaan Raivardhan.

Everyone stood up as the VIPs of the company walked in until the CEO gestured everyone to sit down. Well, since we didn't have seats, we remained standing.

"Good morning everyone! I assume the news has already reached every one of you here. The news of the new Boss," One of the board members started to

talk, "And it's true, I'll tell you that. We are more than happy to welcome one of the most charismatic and ingenious man of this era, Mr. VIAAN RAIVARDHAN!"

The entire conference hall went hysteric with applauds. Viaan stood up signaling to tone down the hysteria.

He walked to the board member who was previously talking and gave him a formal handshake. The board member passed him the mike before taking his place among the other VIPs.

"Thank you, Mr. Bharadwaj. I assume that my introduction isn't required. Let's get to the point directly. As per the company's report, the standards maintained in the company are not at par with the corporate world. But that doesn't mean that it is not unattainable," he paused to take a breath, making us hold our breaths, and then he continued, "To take the company to those standards, to make it par excellence, to make it capable of handling the global competition. I, stand here today, to take you to that level."

Another roar of applause pulsed through the conference hall. He stood there like a king, radiating his power in all the directions and demanding all the attention. His little speech like none other I had ever heard.

Once when the applauds died for the second time, he added, "All the new protocols will be sent to your respective mails. And I expect you all to cooperate with me. Thank you."

He went back to his seat. His speech was short and to the point. Not at all wasting any time with formalities. Yet his speech was powerful and so much like him. Most of the credit went to his voice modulation. He was an amazing orator! Mr. Bharadwaj stood up and announced, "With this, we conclude the meeting, you may all return to your stations."

Everyone stood up to leave as I stared at the podium where the VIPs

remained seated. They were busy discussing something as Mrs. D'Souza nodded her head at something that Viaan was saying.

"Come on, let's go," Kavya grasped me by my elbow, grabbing my attention. Without exchanging another word, we walked out of the conference hall.

Everything was going fine, except for Anand, who wasn't so *Anand*, as Shreya had mentioned. Shahdab was a calm, peaceful man. Very patient but not as talkative as Prem. The only catch was that Anand put a heavy load over me, expecting every single thing to be perfect when he didn't even allow me to take in the environment. Yet, the work was going fine, I suppose.

And soon came the day that none of us expected. The day when the actual hell started! The day when Nishika Raichand walked in through the door.

11. GYRAH

I waved at Kavya who was talking to Shreya at the reception. She waved back. Shreya was just looking at me, so I waved at her too. I didn't need to portray myself as a girl filled with arrogance. That caused Shreya to widen her eyes a bit in surprise but she did wave back.

I had only reached the office and needed to punch my slot. I was already feeling tired for the day.

"Hey!" I smiled lazily at the ladies who greeted me back.

"So, what's up with you and Mr. Raivardhan?" Shreya wriggled her eyebrows causing butterflies to flutter in my stomach. Only one Raivardhan came to my mind and that Raivardhan wouldn't even care to bat an eyelid at me. Even though I couldn't stop thinking about him most of the time.

"What can happen between a boss and an employee?" I shrugged my shoulders nonchalantly.

"I wasn't talking about Mr. Viaan, I was referring to Mr. Aaryan. *That* Raivardhan," she tilted her head slightly emphasizing on 'that'.

"Wait, that was you? The *Raivardhan connection* girl?" Kavya posed in shock.

I just rolled my eyes at that nickname. That incident always reminded me of Jaspreet. Not that she didn't try to approach me after that day, she tried several times, bribing me that is. And all that was done to get me to introduce her to the Raivardhans. The heights of desperation.

But then, since I was shifted to the Designing department, our lunch breaks were at different times and hence she couldn't pester me anymore.

"Shush! Let her answer the main question first!" Shreya hushed Kavya.

"No [yaar](#), Aaryan is like my brother. We just bond that way and share a playful friendship. He was just messing with me the other day," I dismissed the topic with little explanation.

"So... you don't see him that way?" Kavya asked baffled.

"No, I don't."

"You are the first girl to say that she isn't interested in Raivardhans *that* way," Shreya was amused I could tell. I wanted to correct her that I wasn't the first girl... I wasn't immune as they thought me to be. I too had an interest in a certain Raivardhan. A crush, in fact. But I couldn't. I didn't want to tell that I had a big crush over the boss Raivardhan even when I was destined to be marrying another man. I didn't want to end up looking like a slut.

We stood there for sometime gossiping around. At least, I thanked God that I remembered to punch in my arrival, I didn't want to lose any more salary than I already had. It was just yesterday that I had forgotten to punch my entry in the arrival spot and was taken as a latecomer... Though I had been there for half an hour!

I and Kavya finally took our leave and headed towards the elevator. We didn't want to piss Anand anymore than he always was.

After hitting the floor number, we waited for the elevator doors to close when suddenly a hand shot in the middle of the closing doors and stopped the elevator. The doors reopened to reveal a beautiful lady wearing a short maroon wrap dress that fit perfectly around her hourglass figure. She didn't look like an office worker from any angle.

"Is it her birthday or something?" Kavya asked me in a whisper. I just shrugged in reply. How was I supposed to know?

"Excuse me, can you please tell me, on which floor is Viaan in?" She looked at the guy standing by the number panel but then he was busy staring at her long legs. I rolled my eyes. Men will be men.

"Hello?" she stuck her hip out before the man, placing her hand over it, "I know that I'm beautiful just don't be so obvious about it, Viaan doesn't like it."

I couldn't help but frown at her words, she was referring to Viaan like she was pretty close to him. Who was she? Was she his girlfriend, his cousin or his fiancée? She couldn't be his sister or wife, because, I knew for sure that *The Raivardhans* didn't have a sister nor did I see any woman in their house when I had been there.

"Huh?" the guy who had been shamelessly ogling her legs finally seemed to come to his senses and dared to ask, "Viaan who?"

"Viaan!?! You don't know who he is?" She asked in disbelief, "Wait till your boss hears about it."

Like a bulb being lit in his head, the guy paled visibly as he realized that she was talking about *Viaan* the *Raivardhan*, our boss.

"The fifteenth floor," he spoke in panic as he hit the floor button on the panel and stood up straight staring at the metal doors of the lift like they were more interesting than her now. Well, that was bound to happen when you ogle at random ladies buddy, you asked for it.

Nevertheless, I did feel a nasty little tinge in the pit of my stomach. It took me a second to realize that it was a hint of envy that had bubbled in my stomach. She was beautiful, sexy and close to a certain antisocial Raivardhan. Well, he wasn't exactly antisocial, just towards me though. And she *definitely* was a Raivardhan material. It wouldn't be a surprise if she turned out to be his fiancée. Taking a deep breath, I swallowed my ugly feeling. For I knew, he would just remain a celebrity crush of mine. Like a dream that could never be attained, because he was way out of my league. And I was going to be married to Ravi soon.

We got off on our floor as the beautiful femme fatale remained in the elevator while the doors of the lift closed.

Be a mature woman, Rynah. Be a mature woman.

I kept chanting to myself, not wanting to end up before Viaan's work quarters, as I headed towards my cubicle. But that didn't keep me off from glancing at the lift every time it opened.

Not ten minutes later, I stood by the water dispenser, trying to fill my cup with water. But my eyes were glued to the elevator. I didn't even know if the water from the dispenser even made it to the cup or not.

"You won't be able to find whoever you keep looking for," a sudden voice made me jump in my place. I turned around to see Kavya standing behind me with a knowing smile.

"Huh?" I asked her as my mind went blank. My plastic cup now swam in the bucket containing wastewater. There you go Rynah, way to waste things!

"You are waiting for him to be present in the lift when it stops, right?" She put her arm around my shoulder as she stood beside me and looked at the lift as if she could see a dancing frog on the walls and the closed elevator door.

"Who?" I asked not knowing what to say. Innocence was better than denial, right?

She placed a hand over her hip as she looked at me pointedly, "Do I look that much of an idiot to you? I do know one thing for sure, agree or not, but you have a thing for Mr. Raivardhan."

"What!?!?" I might have or might have not shouted that out loud with eyes wide open. That only resulted in Kavya looking around to see if people were staring at us.

"Shush...! Did you have to shout like that?" She hushed me before taking in a deep breath, "looks like Mr. Rock star does affect you, nevertheless."

It took a second for my brain to register her words. Did she think it was Aaryan? I opened my mouth to correct her but then I thought, *what she doesn't know, she didn't have to know, right?*

"And the company pays for you to stand and gossip," a scowling face of a pissed off Anand came into view. I and Kavya immediately turned around to scramble away when we heard, "Wait!"

We braced ourselves to be scolded like little kids as we turned to face Anand once again.

"You, get back to your seat! I expect that document ready by evening, on my table!" Anand pointed at Kavya making her flinch, she shot me an apologetic look before disappearing into the maze of cubicles.

"And you," the sun bear finally turned his eyes towards me before continuing,

"You go and deliver these files to the boss."

Anand dropped a dozen of files on my hands so suddenly that it took all my reflexes to not drop anything.

"Me?" I asked in freaked out squeal, to say the least.

"No, my dead grandma. No one here is as free as you are at the moment. Only you have all the time in the world. Now, head upstairs and deliver this to the boss, shoo!" He shooed me off towards the elevator.

The entire day I had been wanting to catch a glimpse of *him*, just to know if the lady from earlier was someone close to *him* or not. Very nosy of me, I know but wasn't it the human tendency to be a busy body? Then again, now that I have got the legit reason to visit *him* without looking like a stalker, I don't want to do it. My senses had been on overdrive, buzzing them completely and leaving them numb, but my heart... My heart was drumming away.

I got into the elevator and hit the top floor. As the level numbers changed, all my heart did was pick up its pace. And the thought that scared me more was: *what if my heart hammered it's way out?*

I took a deep breath as I walked out of the elevator when the doors opened. The receptionist at the start of the floor looked up. I just raised the file a bit higher as I asked, "Boss?"

I had never been to this floor before, I never had enough courage to do it. She pointed at the rosewood door with a translucent glass panel.

The floor was almost empty on the outside, except for the reception desk, a few potted plants, and a luxurious sofa. I walked up to his office on wobbly legs and trembled a bit as I knocked on the door, not before managing to hold all those files in one hand.

A faint 'come in' was heard before I opened the door and peeked inside. The office was lavish and spacious. The interiors were exotic, like *his* house. A glass wall on the other side of the room was letting a breathtaking view to enhance the room's beauty. Then my eyes zeroed on *him*.

He was seated on a leather chair behind the humongous rosewood table. The dark two-piece suit of his looked so fine on him as he stared at his MacBook's screen meticulously. His hair neatly styled in his signature look.

"Come in when I've allowed you to come in," he said in his authoritative voice making chills go down my spine. It had been quite some time since I last heard his voice. I had forgotten how he sounded but his voice just brought back all those feelings.

I couldn't help but flush a bit as I walked in as dignified as I could. The white marbles showed my reflection on them. It was a bit difficult to walk on the polished floor, I kept sliding every now and then but at least I didn't fall, yet.

"Sir, these files-" he didn't let me finish as he interjected, "Place them on the table." He was pointing on the table behind him while he kept staring at his laptop's screen. I nodded even though he wasn't looking at me and obeyed his order. After placing the files on the table behind him, I turned around only to catch a glimpse of the content on his screen.

It was a music production company and a huge pic of Aaryan holding his guitar during a concert glided in making me take few steps towards Viaan, subconsciously.

"His concert is coming up?" A big grin broke out as I looked at Viaan who had turned to give me a blank look.

Oh shit! Did I just do that?

I hastily took a step back, away from the stone of a boss. Only to hit the back

of my foot over the leg of the table, I was just waiting for the moment where my body would collide with the floor and I would be limping for the rest of the day. But it didn't come. Instead, a strong firm hand caught hold of my wrist preventing me from having a concussion. Even before I realized what was happening, I was pulled back up before I gently collided with a soft fabric covered over a hard chest.

I was frozen in my place, letting my brain register what was going on. The expensive spicy cologne surrounded me making me blink once, twice. As if I had been called, I looked up to meet his cold, dark eyes. My mind was blank. I had never been this close to any man, and this guy wasn't even ugly to start with! Well, except for Aaryan a few days ago but that didn't count. I didn't have a crush on Aaryan.

This near to Viaan, I noticed the golden speckles in his chocolate-brown irises. His eyelashes were long, crowding around his eyes. His eyebrows thick and dark. Our breaths mingled and for that moment I felt so complete. It didn't even properly last for five seconds but it looked like I had spent an eternity with him.

"Viaan," the sudden opening of the door caused both of us to hastily stagger away as if we were doing something very sinful rather than him saving my ass from being damaged. We turned to find the lady from the lift to be staring at us dubiously.

"I told you to knock before coming in, Nishika," Viaan stated in his usual voice, completely unaffected, as he sat back in his chair. Unlike me.

"But Vee baby! I am not some outsider!" Nishika pouted as she crossed the room to stand beside Viaan. *Vee baby?* Did she just call him that and he didn't tell her anything? Like even an objection to that cringy name?

Viaan glanced at me, telling, "You may leave."

I nodded as I swallowed hard. What was I thinking? He is rich and handsome and smart and hot! How would he not have a fiancée? Or even a girlfriend?

Girls were ready to jump on him, anywhere anytime! And here I was crushing over him...

I walked out of the office, lost in my thoughts when I collided into someone for the second time in the last five minutes. And by the expensive cologne, I smelled, I could predict it was one of the VIPs.

I looked up to find Neel Raivardhan standing a whole foot taller before me.

"I'm so sorry! I wasn't thinking!" I blurted out before facepalming, "Seeing! I wasn't seeing!" I corrected myself. Neel who was in a structured black suit just smirked replying, "It's okay."

The sound of a familiar chuckle filled my ears. I looked at Neel's side to find Aaryan's holding his stomach with one hand and a paper cup of coffee in another.

"I must say, I missed you!" Aaryan wiped an invisible tear as stood up straight. I just scowled at him.

"And why am I greeted that way?" He asked while Neel just observed the conversation from the side.

"Because I'm still dealing with the aftermath of the stunt you pulled the other day. I am just going to keep my promise and push you into the *sharks* as you call them," I crossed my arms across my chest.

"Aftermath? How well did it go?" Aaryan's Cheshire grin spread across his lips, he was curious I could say, "If you consider being called as the *Raivardhan-connection* whenever I walked through anywhere, being pestered by annoyingly persistent, horny, irritating and immature cheerleaders who

lacked an important organ called brain and having been frequently asked about our so called non-existent *relationship* some couple of time per hour, then yes, it went absolutely fantastic!"

Both Neel and Aaryan stared at me with wide eyes. I could see the receptionist also stop doing her work to listen to my little rant.

Aaryan held out the coffee cup for me to take and when I did, he and Neel burst out laughing leaving me in confusion.

"What?" I asked the duo, not able to understand why they were laughing, "What's so funny?"

I just frowned as Aaryan answered between his laugh, "That... Was... epic! Damn, I wish I would have recorded it."

That just annoyed me. I threw my hands up in the air, not realizing that I was holding the coffee cup in my hand. Ice cold coffee. Thank goodness that it didn't fall on me.

But what I didn't expect was a sharp scream. I turned around so quickly that my head spun for a few seconds. There, standing half a meter away from me was Nishika, drops of cold coffee dripped from her hair. Her eyes narrowed as she gritted her teeth.

My eyes widened for the umptieth time that day as I stared at her flabbergasted. What the hell was wrong with me today?

"You... you... you imbecile girl! What did you do? Did you want to kill me by freezing me to death? You also ruined my fifty thousand rupees Gucci wrap dress!" She was full on shouting already.

"I-I-I'm... I'm extremely sorry! I d-didn't mean to do this! It was an accident, I swear!" I blurted out in panic.

Viaan was out of his room, watching the show along with the other two Raivardhan brothers.

"What's happened here?" He asked looking from me to Nishika and back to me. His eyes accusing me of the accident already.

"Vee baby! She threw cold coffee all over me and my new Gucci dress! I'm freezingly cold here," she cried as she headed to hug Viaan but he slightly pushed her back.

"You are covered with coffee Nishika, and this is my office, not my home," was Viaan's argument. She stifled another sob making Neel speak, "It was an accident Nishika. Rynah had her back towards you, how could she probably know that you were standing behind her?"

"Yeah, and she didn't even realize she was holding a coffee cup! And she apologized too!" Aaryan added. I felt my heart warm up to hear the two Raivardhan brothers come to my rescue. Viaan just gave me a freezing stare before he handed Nishika a key, "go ahead and change into something comfortable. Sadly, it's only men's wear that I have in my closet at the moment. Use my private washroom to clean up."

"And you, help her out," he turned to give me a stern order before he walked past me and his brothers. Both Neel and Aaryan shot me a worried look before following after Viaan.

I turned around to find Nishika glare at me. She crossed the distance between us and said after making sure that the Raivardhans were out of the hearing range, "Listen here girl, I don't know what game you are playing but let me make it clear to you. Viaan. Is. Mine," she emphasized every single word trying to make an impact on me, "And I will do everything to keep it that way. So, I hope you are getting the point. Stay. Away. From. Him."

With a sass, she turned on her heels and re-entered Viaan's office leaving me

standing there speechless.

I turned to look at the receptionist who my gaze with sympathy that lasted for a second before resuming her work. I was never told something like that ever before. I didn't know what to think or feel about it at the moment. Was I supposed to tell her that she had nothing to worry about because completely he ignored my presence? But if he did ignore my existence then why did he save me from falling in his office today and not scold me when his girlfriend ended up bathing in coffee just because of me?

My head buzzed with questions as I turned around and headed towards the elevator. It was better for my health if I didn't overthink.

12. BARAH

Sitting at my cubicle and trying to concentrate on the work I had been assigned, proved useless, because all I could do was think about Nishika's words.

Viaan. Is. Mine.

Her words kept echoing in my head. It should never have mattered to me. For some reason, it bothered me very much.

Stupid! Stupid Rynah! Focus on your work.

I scolded myself and tried to work again. The keyword being ‘*tried*’. I had only turned to face the screen when Anand announced, "Listen here everyone! This is an announcement from the boss."

Everyone sat back in their chairs and paid attention to what Anand had to say, "Everyone in the office shall undergo a test in the form of personal assessment by a few board members and the boss himself. And if you failed to pass that, kindly collect the pink slip from your desks and never show your face here again.

"We hired you when you were capable of benefiting our company but in case you are no longer in your benefiting state, you can pursue your passions and desires elsewhere. Everyone, irrespective of the years of contribution, the designation or even their powerful contacts, shall be undergoing this test indiscriminately. The tests shall start from today sharp at noon and continue till everyone has been assessed in Design department. Once your names are called, please enter meeting room 2. You all have my good wishes." After dropping that bomb Anand left us alone to let the information sink in.

Only silence prevailed for an entire minute before shocked whisperings filled the room.

"What was that about?" My punjabi neighbor Hemant was out of his wits as he looked around not asking anyone in particular.

"They could at least have notified us prior today! We would have prepared something!" Ananya who was sitting before Hemant was about to cry.

I remained silent in shock, unable to process anything about it...

Soon the names were called one after the other. And people started walking towards the examination room all tensed.

"Hemant Singh!" My neighbor had been called making him wipe his forehead glistening with sweat, fix his yellow turban before heading towards the dreadful room.

Kavya was the one who came out of the room with her shoulders slumped, like she felt defeated. Unable to stand watching her slumped shoulders, I headed towards her only to find tears glistening in her eyes, threatening to shed.

"Kavya?" I called gently. She engulf me in a sudden hug and silently cried over my shoulder.

"He's horrible, Rynah! He's so horrible!" She mumbled over and over again.

"Who?" I asked even when I had an idea who she was talking about.

"Mr. Raivardhan... He is such a jerk!" She gritted her teeth.

"Why? What happened?" I frowned. She pulled away and opened her mouth to explain.

"Rynah Kundra," I heard my name being called and blood drained from my face as I stared at the woman who called for me from the meeting room 2 before closing the door behind her.

Kavya just gave me an emphatic look as I moved towards the door. Nausea took over my entire being. With trembling hands and a rapidly pounding heart, I knocked at the door.

"Come in," the woman who had called my name, permitted. I walked in with wobbly legs and mustered a little smile that I didn't even know I had in me. At the end of the room sat six people behind a curved table. Five of board members were in their later forties. Four of them being men while their fifth partner was a woman. And the last person was none other than Viaan himself,

who had been seated in the middle. Their faces housed grave expressions. They glanced through the files laid before them.

A whiteboard placed a few feet away from their table along with a marker and duster, beside a lone chair. Memories of sitting in an interview resurfaced.

Walking towards them with a timid smile, I stood beside the chair waiting for anyone to oblige me to sit. It never came, they just stared at me while Viaan stared at the file.

"May I sit?" I asked in a slightly trembling voice, feeling my jelly legs. No one spoke, Viaan just gestured at the chair allowing it.

"Care to explain why your performance has been so low, Ms. Kundra?" Viaan raised his eyes to meet mine. To say I had forgotten how to speak would be a great way to put my condition at the moment.

"S-sir?" Finally, I was able to let the word out of my mouth.

"This file here," he raised the file before him as he continued, "Is your progress report and I see that you have never met the expectations in the designing team, care to explain why? Are we wasting our money on you?"

"I-I've only recently joined the designing team. I—" he cut me off in the middle asking, "When was the date of your joining?"

I frowned trying to remember, "Almost a month ago...?"

"Okay, what are the basic strategies that we implement before designing our projects? The board is there, write it down for us," He said leaning back in his chair, somehow showcasing his dominance.

Basic strategies that they implemented before designing? How was I

supposed to know when Anand put me in the development team for three weeks and I was shifted to the design team just a week ago? And above all, I was still learning the ropes about what processes were followed here...

"I-I didn't—" he cut me off for the second time, "We don't have the entire day Ms. Kundra. Please proceed to the board."

I hesitantly got up and stepped towards the board feeling eyes on my back. I looked over my shoulder before picking the marker.

Basic strategies of the company could refer to anything! It could be the procedures to follow, methods to implement, tools to be used, documents to be produced, the list can go on and on... What was I supposed to write here?

Taking a deep breath, I turned to face them again, "Sir, I—"

"You what, Ms. Kundra? Don't you know the simple basics of the department you worked in for a month?" Viaan asked annoyed.

"Let me explain—"

"Explain what? Except for the fact that you somehow managed to graduate from an IIT and got into this company, you don't even know the basics even after one month?" Viaan stood up buttoning his coat as he walked around the desk, just to stop before me. He glared into my eyes. Our closeness allowed me to feel his minty breath on my face. His hands buried themselves in his pockets.

"Sir, please..." I whimpered feeling my desperation sweep through my body. My voice trembled, tears pooled on the edge of my eyes.

"I don't care who you are Ms. Kundra. I don't care if you are the president's daughter or *the Raivardhan-connection*," he said the last words so sardonically that made me cringe visibly, "I don't give a shit about it. All I

need is your skills and knowledge to run this company but you seem to have none. Answer this and you may keep your job, else feel free to walk out anytime and never come back. I can run my company without you."

He withdrew to walk back and take his seat as if nothing had happened. I remained standing, trembling visibly as a sob threatened to break out before the five other stone statues who kept mum and watched the show.

"Carla, call the-" this time I interjected him, letting my education from my university guide me into answering the question I had been asked, "Requirement implementation, validation, and feasibility study."

Everyone stared at me for a second, the board members had an approval on their faces but Viaan's face remained blank as ever.

"Correct answer," one of the board members confirmed.

I met Viaan's challenging gaze, "T-That was my knowledge gained from my university and some common sense. And not any kind of exposure from the department."

Everyone just continued to stare at me as I let the blood pumping in my head to erupt the throttled emotions I had bottled up.

"If you would have been humble enough, you would have heard me explain. Though I had been hired as a designer, I worked three weeks in the development department because a certain head of the design department didn't want to trouble himself accommodating a newcomer in his busy schedule. Within three weeks, I could compete with the team leaders of the development department. You can verify the facts. I couldn't answer you immediately because I was still learning about the new department I have been shifted to," I looked at them bitterly.

"Only if you would have cared to listen," I directly accused Viaan with my

eyes.

"What do you imply, Ms. Kundra? What do you suppose we do by hearing your sob story?" Viaan asked haughtily.

I just gave him a rueful smile. I know I would be regretting it later, nevertheless, I did it, "What can I even expect from a jerk like yourself, Mr. Raivardhan?"

I watched eyes widening all around the room except for Viaan's. Instead, they remained the same like he was challenging me to continue. And so I did, "As much as I need this job to stabilize my family, I love and respect myself enough to not let myself feel any more insulted than what I have been enduring for a week.

"As you said, your company can work without me but I won't be able to look into my own eyes whenever I look into a mirror if I continued to work here."

I heard a gasp from the female board member.

"I wish you luck in the future, hope you find employees of *your* expectations because I quit!" I turned around haughtily and walked towards the door.

Viaan hadn't react to my words at all while the board members whispered under their breaths.

The lady who called names of the employees, who I presumed to be named Carla, stared at me with wide eyes as I walked past her. I didn't wait around to be questioned by others and walked to the elevator to hit the button.

Oh the air of arrogance *he* carried with him, one thing was sure, he was the worst of all the jerks in the world. And in the end, I concluded, my crush on him died the moment he showed me that obnoxious attitude.

That jerk!

I wanted to scream my head out but instead ended up regretting my sassiness. Did I had have to open my big mouth there? My eyes were clouding with unshed tears as my lower lip quivered.

Stupid! Stupid! Stupid Rynah! Now, what was I going to do?

"Craziness?" I looked up to find a blurred vision of Aaryan standing by my side. Concern harboured his face.

Beside him stood Neel and Nishika. I couldn't help but notice the oversized white shirt she was wearing under an oversized blazer and an oversized dress pants. It didn't need a freaking Einstein to understand that she was in Viaan's clothes. *Viaan*, I felt like strangling that jerk! I looked at his brother, Neel who looked just as worried as Aaryan, while Nishika openly displayed her content.

"Viaan, as we know, loves me a lot," she smirked making Neel snap at her, "Please, shut up."

Her smirk evaporated into air as his words registered in her head. The elevator opened with a ding, catching my attention.

"Neel, you go ahead. I'll join you later," Aaryan uttered in a rush as he gently grabbed my elbow and pulled me into the empty elevator.

Neel just nodded while casting another worried look at me before the elevator doors closed. I stood there silently, not in a mood to talk. The elevator opened again on the sixth floor but people restrained themselves from getting in when Aaryan gave them a cold look. The next time it opened on the ground floor. I let Aaryan grab my arm as he gently pulled me through the lobby, where everyone halted to stare at us.

Quickly walking out of the main entrance, Aaryan opened the passenger door of his black *Porsche Boxter* for me and took the keys from the valet before he got into the driver's seat. Slowly driving away from the abhorrent building, he glanced at me.

"You can cry all you want now," the second those words left his mouth, I broke down into tears. I don't know how long I cried for.

"Jerk! Such an arrogant jerk he is! Asshole!" I screamed in between my sobs startling Aaryan in his seat, catching him off-guard.

"Calm down, Craziness. Sure agreed, whomever you were talking about is a jerk but that doesn't mean that you end us both up in a hospital," Aaryan controlled the steering wheel bringing the car back on the lane which had drifted over to cycle track and scaring a lot of pedestrians.

"Sorry," I apologized realizing the consequences I would have been responsible for if Aaryan hadn't controlled the wheel on time.

"Care to elaborate?" He asked turning right on a road and entering into a gate.

"Where are we?" I asked at the sight of familiar yet not so familiar place.

"Raivardhan mansion. I drove in through the other gate rather than the one we came in through the last time."

My lips formed an 'o' in understanding as we got down the car and headed towards the glass elevator.

Once inside the elevator, I avoided looking at myself in the mirror. Aaryan turned to me, "You look like a mess."

I rolled my eyes, "Ain't I always, whenever I come here?"

He snickered at my words. The elevator stopped on the third floor and we

walked towards the living room.

Daksh came out of a room, completely dressed and carrying his briefcase.

"You are home already?" Aaryan asked his brother.

"No, I had forgotten an important document back here. So, had to come to retrieve it," Daksh's eyes landed on me making him frown, "Rynah, are you alright?"

Before I could speak, Aaryan beat me to it, "she's been crying the entire way. I am still trying to get her to open up. You get going, you must be running late."

Instead of obliging to Aaryan's words, Daksh stepped closer as he placed his hand on my shoulder and spoke in a gentle tone, "No matter what it is, if it made you cry, it ain't worth it."

I felt like crying out of warmth that spread in my chest. They were so nice! Why couldn't their brother be like them? Why, oh why did I have to have a crush on a jerk?

I nodded my head with a small smile.

"Good, take care of yourself," he said before turning towards Aaryan, "Take care of her."

And then with a polite smile, he walked away from us towards the lift.

"Now, will you tell me what happened to you?" I turned to look at a stern looking Aaryan.

"That's when you and Neel found me..." I poured my heart out to him as I let

him know how much of a jerk his brother had been. Before I started with my *sob story* as Mr. Bossy Raivardhan had put it, Aaryan guided me to a private sitting area on the fourth floor, overlooking at a family dining from the mezzanine.

"I'm not surprised by his behavior," Aaryan spoke, at last, explaining further, "That's *his* way of testing people. Put them into a situation and let them handle stress. You know the answer to anything he asks or doesn't, doesn't actually matter to him. He shall only see how you handle it. So, in case an emergency arises, you should be able to handle it."

"But that wasn't testing, that was full on insulting!" I exclaimed.

"What's the guarantee that the situation which arises won't let you hear a few insults about yourself? Better prepare your people before something like that happens."

I understood what Aaryan was pointing out. I felt so stupid at the moment for acting impulsively that I regretted opening my big mouth in the meeting room. I wanted to cry all over again.

Stupid! Stupid Rynah!

"No worries, he's not a heartless monster to cut you off like that. I don't think he would have fired you since you were the one who said you were quitting. He shall wait for your resignation letter. Talk to him then and clear out the misunderstandings," Aaryan added with an amused smile.

"Let's hope he doesn't feel very cannibalistic that day," I grumbled to myself nevertheless he heard it as he burst out laughing, "You are just amazing!"

"Yeah, yeah. And only you can think about entertainment at a moment like this," I rolled my eyes. He was about to retort when a security guard appeared before us making Aaryan restrain from whatever he was saying.

"Sir, the surveillance office head need you to see something really important," the guard spoke like an army officer. Aaryan swiftly gazed at me, "I'll be back in a moment, Rynah. Make yourself at home. If you want, you can head over to my studio and busy yourself."

He winked at me as he followed the guard making me smile at him in return. I got up to look around the house a little, after all, he had asked me to make myself comfortable. I walked around the corner to find multiple doors along the corridor. Which one of these was Aaryan's studio?

In a hurry, he hadn't given me the directions and I being me, hadn't even asked for it.

I opened the first door to find a lavish room. It wasn't a bedroom or studio. I walked inside the room admiring its beauty. There in the center of the room resided a mahogany wood table with a comfortable looking leather seat behind it. Two expensive looking chandeliers hung from the ceiling on either side of the room.

Did I just walk into someone's office? I moved forward and looked at the files that were neatly arranged on a side stand. Above the files was an unopened parcel.

Mr. VIAAN RAIVARDHAN was printed on it.

Oh shit! I had walked into the lion's private den!

I immediately rushed out like the room was lit on fire. If Viaan found out about it, he would set *me* on fire for sure. I closed the door behind me like it was before I walked inside, and quickly looked around to see if anyone had seen me walking in.

Breathing a sigh of relief upon finding no one, I headed back to the mezzanine where Aaryan had initially brought me.

I thought my little tour went unnoticed, had thought that it wouldn't put me into any problem. The keyword being '*thought*'. Because I was dead wrong. I had signed my very own doom and I didn't even know. A doom named as Viaan Raivardhan.

13. TERAH

I stood there admiring the view from the glass wall waiting for Aaryan to return. I was lost in my thoughts about what I had done and what I should have done instead.

I had let my heart take control of the situation, and acted impulsively rather than rationally. Now, I was jobless!

I sighed in frustration. Will Viaan listen to me ever again? After I called him a jerk before the board of members? Will he let me keep the job as Aaryan had suggested?

Stupid! Stupid Rynah! This is all your big mouth's doing!

I groaned loudly, feeling exhausted from the internal argument.

"You should not trouble your pretty little head there, Craziness," I turned to find Aaryan who was followed by a butler carrying a tray of delicacies and juices. Aaryan motioned the tray to be placed on the teapoy which the butler did and left.

Sitting down like an elegant man, Aaryan motioned me to mirror.

"I think I should get going. I have to get back to the office to retrieve my

things. I've left everything back there... And possibly try to talk to Viaan," I explained.

"Don't worry Rynah, I've asked Neel to grab your things on his way back," he picked up a raspberry and put it into his mouth.

"Really? Thank you so much!" I exclaimed gratefully and almost hugged him, 'almost' being the keyword. I wouldn't want to give that charming rascal a reason to tease me. He just replied with a two-finger salute, like the captains.

"I'll head over to meet my cousin for a while and then be back to collect my things later?" I asked hopefully.

"Sure, go ahead. Have a great time! You deserve it," he winked after popping another raspberry into his mouth.

You know what? Chuck it! I was giving him a hug, and a tight one!

Without wasting another second, I took a step towards him and hugged him taking him by surprise. When I withdrew, he still had his eyes wide open, "what was that for?"

I just smirked as I replied, "that was the payback for what you did. Get ready to be worshiped by queen bitches."

I winked at him when he laughed at me for giving him back his words. I headed towards the lift when I turned around and added, "you know what, Aaryan? You are the perfect friend a girl could ever ask for."

He grinned wider when he heard my words.

"What!?!!" To say I was surprised didn't cover it. I was utterly dumbfounded

would be the best way to put it.

I stared at Anjali for a whole two minutes.

"Say something," she spoke desperately. Her eyes pleaded me.

"Let's me get this right. You are dating that broker guy?" I put it out bluntly.

"His name is Raj. And no, we aren't dating... yet," she added the last word timidly like I would slap her hard if she told the same in her normal pitch.

"Yet? When did it happen? How did it happen? Does anyone else know about it? You know that your parents will have a heart attack if they learn about this?" I was having a question-diarrhea here, firing her with all the possible questions buzzing in my head.

"Hush! Do you have to be so loud?" Anjali looked cautiously at the door before turning back to me.

After leaving the Raivardhan mansion, I headed to my aunt's house. Aunt Lasika had opened the door. And Anjali was exultant to see me. She didn't wait even for a second before dragging me to her room on the second floor. And that was when I found out the real reason for her ecstasy. She had no idea about my day, and I didn't plan to ruin hers by telling her about it.

"No one knows about it, except for you. If either of Luv, Kush or my father finds out about that, they will no doubt try everything to chase Raj away but... But Rynah, I don't think I can live without him," Anjali's eyes swelled up with tears making me cut some slack on her. I moved forward and hugged her.

"Hey, don't cry, we will find a way to fix all this. If you happen to like him that much, then he must be really likable," I rubbed her back in consolation.

She sniffled a bit causing me to pull away and smile at her, "now will do the honors of supplying me with all the details?"

She let out a giggle as she looked down. Her eyes filled with adoration while her cheeks turned a lovely shade of pink, "he started showing up at my college. Always standing by the tree that was visible from the window beside my seat. He would do nothing. He would never approach me, never throw a chit or pebble, never even send me a bouquet. Nothing at all. At first, I was nervous but then seeing him not doing anything, just standing there by the tree all day long started frustrating me.

"Once he even got caught by one of my lecturers but he ran away from there only to come back and stand at the same place once the lecturer had left. He would just send me those dreamy looks and goofy smiles.

"Gosh! Rynah! He's so adorable! I spent more time watching him than listening my lessons. Everyone from my class knew about him. Many of the hoes even approached him but he would just keep staring at me. Finally, I got fed up of waiting for him to do something and went to him, asking about his problem.

"He just said one thing. That one thing that melted my heart more than it already had, he said," Anjali shied for a second before adding, " 'You' " Anjali's words made me let out a stunned, "huh?"

She looked like a crazy lady to me at the moment, had she lost her mind somewhere? I couldn't help but exclaim, "Anjali, what's so heart meltingly romantic when a guy says his problem is *you!*!?"

"Hey! Not that exactly, it's his words after that," she sighed dreamily before continuing, "[Kashmakash ke halat main dala tumne humko...](#)

[Raat aur din main na rahe ab farak mujhko...](#)

[Rah par se bhatka aise ke dhoond Rahi sari duniya...](#)

[Jab tumne poocha ki meri problem kya hai, toh suno](#)

[Meri problem bhi tum ho aur solution bhi tum ho..."](#)

"That's a [Shayari](#)," I mused, quite impressed by Raj's creativity.

"Yup, he's an amateur [shayar](#)," Anjali nodded in agreement before sighing again. I just rolled my eyes.

She looked at me as she narrowed her eyes, the slight blush darkening on her cheeks, "wait till you get your special one. Everything about him shall be the most beautiful aspect to you."

"Yeah yeah, I'm dying to experience that," I deadpanned. I casually glanced at the watch and saw the hour hand pointing at eight.

"Oh crap! I'm late, Mom will kill me!" I scurried from the bed and rushed towards the door. Anjali just chuckled as she followed me.

Aunt Lasika was talking to someone over the phone, I skipped to her and gave a half hug before mouthing a bye and waving at her. She waved back. I quickly hugged Anjali before putting on my wedges and running out of the front door.

I was already near the main road when I remembered that I didn't have any cash on me, I had to pick my things from Aaryan or Neel. I rushed back to the Raivardhan mansion, towards the other gate, the gate through which Aaryan had driven the car earlier. Only, I didn't know that my life was going to take a complete 180 degrees flip.

I reached the gates just to stop when the watchmen prevented me from entering and made me reasoned with them breathlessly. One of them called

someone, while I was still catching my breath, I heard the gruff voice of the watchman talk, "Sir, there is a lady at the gate. She says forgot her things inside. She had come with Master Aaryan this afternoon."

He paused for a second listening to the person before replying, "okay, sir."

He ended the call and asked the other watchman to open the gate for me. One of them escorted me to the lift and said, "third floor. Head over to the family dining."

I just nodded timidly before doing as I had been instructed, though I wasn't very familiar with the house. The lift opened on the third floor revealing a dimly lit hallway and slightly brightly lit living room. No one was in sight.

"Aaryan? Neel?" I called out feeling awkward yet no one replied.

Goosebumps raised on my skin, I don't know why. Obviously, I walked deeper into the mansion towards the dining room that was attached to the living room. Nearing it, I make out the red candles lit on the table as dinner for two had been laid out.

The flutes of some red drink sparkled in the candlelight. The mouthwatering aroma of food floated through the air. But that wasn't what grabbed my attention. It was the sight of a man that had his back towards me as he looked out the glass wall, staring into the beautiful nightscape. His black blazer kept aside on a chair, his dress pants fit him snugly showing how fit he had been, so did his white dress shirt.

I stood frozen in my place, captivated by how beautiful and elegant he looked, yet, hesitant to approach him.

"I was waiting for you," his silky deep voice erupted shivers down my spine.

"V-Viaan," I managed to greet before wanting to facepalm myself as I

corrected, "Mr. Raivardhan."

He turned around to look at me with a little smile on his lips but it didn't quite reach his eyes. His eyes remained as cold as iceberg. He blinked once evaporating the coldness off of them. Had I imagined it? But then he smiled properly at me.

Oh gosh! How handsome he looked!

It was the first time that I had seen him with a smile and it did unthinkable things to my heart and my body. I had to keep reminding myself not to drool, not to stare and not to swoon. But I was almost doing it anyway, and not so discreetly...

He undid the sleeve buttons and rolled them up till his elbows.

I think I was surely going to faint now... literally.

He moved elegantly towards the chair and pulled it out as he stood behind it staring at me. It took me some time to understand what he was gesturing to, and when I did, I couldn't help but flush out of embarrassment, "oh no, no. Thank you so much. I am here just to collect my things, I shall be leaving soon after that."

He left the chair like that and sauntered his way to stop before me. My legs started turning into jelly when his cologne hit my senses. He bent forward, letting his breath tickle the skin of my neck as he whispered, "Come on, it's just one dinner. You and I, both know that you want to have this. You can take your things later."

Good lord, I was indeed going to faint now!

I trembled as shocks went down my spine when his hands slightly held my elbows. I felt his lips giving my earlobe a ghost of touch making me shiver

visibly. Suddenly, it felt like I was inside an oven. A burning hot oven. My heart pounded five times faster than it usually did.

He withdrew to look at me, his chocolate black holes for eyes holding mine as their hostages. I was breathless, speechless and at the moment to some extent even mindless.

Gently grabbing my hands after letting those rough fingers of his brush down the length of the exposed skin of my lower arms, he guided me to the chair that he had pulled out a while ago. And I followed him like a happy little girl I was.

Pushing my chair front like a true gentleman man after I sat down, he picked a flute of red drink and leaned against the table beside me.

"Why don't you try the steak? It's still hot," he smiled making me blush.

"I-I shouldn't have-" he placed his finger above my lips shushing me completely, "it is just the beginning. How can I allow you to leave without having it?"

More electric sparks jolted down my spine, I don't know if it was from his touch or his words.

He smiled made my stomach clench. My mind wasn't processing anything, all I did was stare at him. He poured the red drink into my glass before passing it to me.

"It was a tedious day," he sighed looking out of the glass wall making me hum in agreement.

Why was he being so nice to me all of a sudden?

The sudden question bothered me. Yeah, why did *he* become all charming

and gentleman towards me?

"Where is Nishika?" Asking casually, I sipped from the flute though I had a nagging feeling deep inside.

Yum! It was beetroot orange fusion juice.

He turned to give me another one of his charming smiles, "it doesn't matter. What matters more is us alone over here."

Okay, as much as I liked the sound of that, I knew something was terribly wrong in here. I could feel sirens blaring in my head *Red Alert! Red Alert! Friendly Viaan!*

But was I judging him too harshly?

"How was your day?" He came in closer making me scoot a bit to my other side to maintain some distance from him.

"A-apart from the test you took and me bawling my eyes for half of the day, everything else was fine. Mr. Raivardhan," I stood up to face him, to maintain a little more distance before continuing. I couldn't risk being distracted by him, "c-can we talk?"

"Aren't we?" He stepped closer making me step back. That caused him to narrow his eyes for a split of a second before he recomposed himself but I saw it nevertheless.

"N-not about that... It's a-about my j-job."

"That was where I was heading to," he replied calmly as he took another step towards me and I hit my back to a glass wall when I stepped back. How did I even reach here? He placed his hand on the left of my face, blocking my escape completely.

"I—" he cut me off asking, "how much did he pay you?"

"Pardon?" I look at him baffled. His smooth charming composure dissolved into the cold, stern look.

"How much did he pay you?" He gritted through his teeth.

"What are you talking—" he cut me off by slamming his fist into the wall causing a short scream to escape my mouth.

"Damn it! Don't you dare lie to me! Where is the file? Who did you give it after taking it from here?" He shouted at my face, making me cringe.

I was scared. So very scared...

"I-I don't know what you are talking about," my heart pounded in my chest for a completely different reason now.

"Don't know? Don't know, huh?" He withdrew and stepped back. Grabbing my upper arm, he dragged me towards the stairs. His tight grip over my arm was almost painful, "V-Viaan, what are you d-doing? Please l-let me go!"

He dragged me up the stairs, while I tried to pry his fingers off me but he was just too strong. He continued to drag me around the corner and opened one of the doors opposite to his office before pushing me in.

Grabbing his tie from the sofa, he held me down and started tying my hands behind my back.

"What are you doing? Stop it! Please let me go, Viaan!" I started screaming.

Nevertheless, he succeeded in tying me up by pinning me down on the bed with his knee pressed on my back and was about to tie my feet when the door burst open when I screamed again. Barging into the room, were his three brothers, Neel, Vikrant, and Aaryan, shock evident on their faces.

"Viaan, what are you doing?" Neel was the first one to break the silence as he moved forward.

Viaan stood straighter as he said calmly, "out."

"Brother—" he cut Aaryan off as he shouted pointing at the door, "I said out!"

I got up and ran towards them as they started to move towards the door, "don't please!"

My desperation and fear were evident in my voice but a strong arm snaked around my waist pulling me back as my back hit a hard chest. Viaan's growl vibrated from behind, "don't test my patience."

Aaryan and Neel looked at me with worry as they walked out. Vikrant had already disappeared behind the door without even a hint of emotion on his face. The door shut close as I begged Viaan, "please, just let me go."

"I will when you tell me to whom you gave the file?" Viaan turned me around to face me.

"I didn't give any damned file to anyone!" I shouted as I tried to pull myself away from him but no avail. He clenched his jaws as anger blazed in his eyes. He threw me over the bed for the second time as he fastened my feet securely together with his other tie, threatening, "then stay here till you tell me the truth."

I panicked by hearing his words and started shouting, "help! Someone help please! This guy has kidnapped me!"

He scowled at me as he walked into what I assumed to be his walk-in closet and soon came out holding another tie and a pair of socks. I tried to push myself away from him but it wasn't very successful. He grabbed my leg and

pulled me down before shoving the socks into my mouth and fastening the tie around my mouth. I wanted to puke.

"Be grateful that I've gagged you with new unused socks, try something funny then you shall know how my feet tastes," he withdrew back to look at his handiwork. I tried to untie my hands but he sure did know how to tie complicated knots.

"This, what you can see all around you, is not one or two members' hard work. This is the blood and sweat of all five of us, that we achieved after working day and night like dogs," Viaan stretched his arms showing the house around him as he glared at me, "and I'm not going to let you bring us down just like that."

He turned and left me in the room, leaving me to cry my eyes off. It was official, I was a hostage held by the Raivardhan.

14. CHAUDAH

The lights of the city twinkled from afar from behind the glass wall, it looked so beautiful like there were clusters of stars on the ground. But I wasn't paying any attention to it or even admiring the beauty.

In reality, I had my eyes swollen from crying for an hour or two, unable to free myself from the binds.

I missed my mom now, I missed her so badly. She must have been worried sick about me. I had missed the curfew way long back.

I sniffled imagining her worried eyes staring at the road in search of me.

I laid down, unable remain seated. None of the Raivardhan brothers had come in after Viaan had left the room. My slowly eyelids closed as my energy completely drained. I didn't want to sleep, especially not in that barbaric arrogant jerk's bed. Nope, not in a million years. But, who can defeat sleep when it came slapping on their face?

Eventually, I fell deep in slumber, unaware of what was happening on the other side of the wall, between the Raivardhans.

"You really tied Rynah up in your room?" Daksh asked confused as well as shocked, still not able to fathom what he was hearing. Viaan just remained silent, like he usually did, most of the time. Aaryan leaning over the door glanced at Viaan trying to decipher him while the rest of them stood around in the office.

"But why?" Daksh threw his hands in the air, slightly frustrated for the innocent sweet girl he had met just a few days ago. Something about her made him want to protect her. The same force that drove Neel and Aaryan have a soft side for a girl but that didn't affect the two elder brothers, Viaan and Vikrant. Both remained unmoved by the warmth of Rynah's personality. Both remained frozen cold inside and out. More like Viaan didn't want to have any soft corners for anyone except his family, and that was what he was doing.

"*She has the File,*" Viaan gritted through his teeth.

"What?" Simultaneously the rest of the Raivardhans ululated in disbelief at once.

"She was in my office this afternoon and *the File* has been missing after since. Then she left the mansion with it, acting all innocent like she always did," Viaan's eyes were blazing with cold rage. He just couldn't control it whenever he remembered the CCTV footage of Rynah casually walking into the room and rushing out of it just a few minutes later as if she'd been chased by wild dogs. He hated how innocent she looked when she was cunning as a jackal from within. He was so sure that she was just like the rest of them, selfish, fake, cunning and a gold digger. Oh, he hated her from the core of his heart.

"But... But she didn't carry anything out of here. Not even her things," Aaryan frowned at his memory.

"I don't know how she did it, but the file isn't there. No matter how many

times I've searched for it," Viaan leaned on the table of his office.

"If it's Viaan who says that, then I don't have any doubt about it," Vikrant folded his hands as he sat down on the arm of the sofa which was placed on the side.

"Brother, we don't question your authority, nor do we doubt you. But... But from what we know about the girl, I don't know why but something keeps prompting me that maybe, just maybe we've misunderstood the situation?" Neel spoke for the first time that night. His featured schooled into a thoughtful expression.

"Yeah, what if she didn't take it?" Aaryan added with a similar logic.

"Impossible, she has taken the file," Viaan argued.

"She might have, but what if, what if she hasn't?" Aaryan stressed at *what if* causing Viaan to think for a second before he continued, "then we will be chasing the wrong lead while *the File* slips out of our reach."

That finally had Viaan thinking again.

"But she must have it," he whispered to himself still having a hard time believing the possibility that his brothers had pointed out.

For a second, and just for that second, his face had been skeptical but then he was not known as the '*ice slab*' for no reason. He regained his composure as he stood up straight, "we search for *the File* till we get it and I shall let Ms. Kundra go only when I have it in my hand. It may or may not have her hand behind its disappearance. So, talk to her and make her understand that her key to freedom is only truth, and I shall continue to search for it. Give me a hand when you are satisfied with my decision."

The brothers nodded feeling a bit relieved to hear Viaan's final decision. At

least he wasn't contemplating to push her off the cliff if needed as he had before. That was only if *needed*.

Something that didn't sound too chaotic or very big of a price to pay. Something for the hope to build upon. But not always what we think is what shall happen.

What the Raivardhan brothers thought wasn't a big deal was in turn the biggest deciding aspect of my life.

All that Neel, Aaryan, and Daksh wanted to do was find *the File* and prove me innocent, indeed making the chief justice Sir Viaan to discharge me of the charges that he had pressed on me. They thought that a few days of me remaining tied up, without a word to my family would be like how many other non-Indian parents would think that their child had been out enjoying the time of their lives or out on a sudden world trip. Well, maybe or maybe not. And that wasn't the case with my parents...

They were the epitome of typicality. The perfect example of an *Indian* family. They couldn't leave me alone to study in IIT Hyderabad. What might have been their thoughts when they learned that I had been missing?

Viaan's impulsive decision had already caused a tsunami in life. All that was left now was a volcano to erupt, a tornado to blow it off and a hurricane to flood the remaining of it with depression.

While I slept oblivious to the world, my mom had already called twenty different relatives in the city, all of my colleagues and college friends and was just one step away from calling the cops and lodging an FIR. Why? Because the soap eras that she had been surviving on made her believe that there's a law in India for filing the missing complaint only after 24 hours of the person being missing. But that hasn't stopped her from calling several different police stations and hearing them say they are on it, again and again. And way before that, she had called me several times, only if she could reach

me. Viaan had taken care of my mobile by removing the SIM from my phone. No matter how many times, whoever called, I would remain unreachable...

Even my dad heard the news about me missing, and he only hoped that I was on the way home, just stuck in the traffic with my mobile battery that had died on me.

Then, he was just a man. And men realized the gravity of the situation a bit later than mothers. Nevertheless, he remained stronger comforting my mother.

With all the serious drama going everywhere revolving around me, within the Raivardhan mansion and outside the Raivardhan mansion, had me thinking about one thing: *how a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication could lead to bigger conclusions and decisions...*

Wasn't that how fate worked? Well, it did have its own twisted ways to shape a person's life. And at that point it was shaping mine with such a delight, utterly enjoying every little plight of mine.

Maybe, I was its favorite pastime...

The next time I opened the eyes, the streaks of sun rays illuminated the beautiful interiors of the ceiling. The crystals of the chandelier sparkled from the high ceiling. The glass walls let the view of the beautiful landscape of the sleeping city of Hyderabad covered in the morning sunlight enthralled me.

"Ooh... That's pretty," I mumbled to myself in my drowsy state when I noticed that I wasn't sounding how I was supposed to. My voice came out in a muffled mumble and my throat was drier than a desert. Immediately, the panic set in as unfamiliar surroundings registered to my malfunctioning brain.

I was screaming and shouting and thrashing. What was I not doing? Oh yeah,

thinking.

My morning panics had just jumped a level or two in intensity as no familiar face came to my rescue. To add cherry over the top, my hands and feet were bound as well as my mouth gagged.

I was going to die. I was cent percent sure that I was going to die young because of the panic attack!!!

I was so blinded with the panic, that I didn't see a figure running to my side as he held my squirming shoulders and shouted, "Daksh! Daksh!"

Soon more people rushed into the room but I was more busy being perturbed. I was pulled back, my gag removed, my hands untied but I was still flailing like a deranged octopus out of water.

"She's having a panic attack, she's hyperventilating!" I heard another voice exclaim but I wasn't paying any heed to anyone.

My breathing ragged, actually I had a hard time letting my lungs have the amount of oxygen needed to stay alive. The fear drowned me in itself. And I was sweating like a swine.

I was going to die! I was going to die!

"Someone, just fucking get that kit of his!" Someone else was shouting not very far away. But nothing was making sense to me. Everything was blurry and maddeningly horrific.

Soon, I felt a strong arm snaked around my waist, holding my wrists tight against my body. And then a little prick inside the elbow joint caused me to flinch back only to feel a hard chest behind me.

The rubbing of some soft material over my skin captured my attention. Soon

the panic subdued and was replaced by a dull numbness. I felt drowsy again. Maybe I had lost enough energy to function properly for the day. With a slightly burning eyes with sleep, I finally focused on my surroundings for the second time. Daksh was sitting before me holding a syringe. The hands holding me back from thrashing around vigorously let me go as he stood up, after making sure that I was in enough control.

My breathing should have hitched up but surprisingly it didn't when Viaan walked away from me towards the walk-in closet.

He was in a black tank top over black track pants. His muscles flexing had me staring for a bit but then the wave of dizziness hit me. I saw Vikrant smirking by the door before walking out.

"What did you give me?" I asked turning to face Daksh, who was already disposing of the syringe.

"I gave you a light tranquilizer, it will make you feel drowsy for some time but eventually wear off. It will ease your nerves," Daksh looked like he in the middle of getting dressed before he came rushing here. His shirt was halfway buttoned up, his tie hanging around his neck undone, no socks in his feet.

"How often does it happen?" He asked something akin to concern flashed in his eyes. I wouldn't have told him anything, in fact, I wouldn't have talked to any of them if I hadn't been drugged with a tranquilizer. If it hadn't numbed my senses and feelings, I would definitely have thrown another fit.

But my mind was irrational at the moment, it took my enemy as a my friend and indeed made me reply him, "whenever I wake up in an unfamiliar place, and not seeing a familiar face in that new surroundings."

He took his seat back before me, "for how long has it been going on?" He asked further, he held a pitiful expression on his face.

"Ever since I can remember. For a very long time," I stared out of the glass wall trying to recall the first time I encountered it but nothing came to my mind. All I was greeted was numbness.

"Tell her about what we discussed yesterday. I can't wait for Aaryan or Neel to break it to her," Viaan's authoritative voice floated through the room making me look at him. He was in an oak brown blazer over gray dress pants and a white shirt.

I bet he had his entire closet filled with only white shirts.

With a bored glance at me, Viaan moved towards the door and walked out but not before saying, "Explain to her what shall happen *if* she doesn't cooperate with us."

Daksh looked at me thinking how to start or perhaps where to start. Finally, he swished over his lower lip before starting, "okay, you may not be very comfortable with me at the moment, like how you feel around Aaryan. But unfortunately, he's busy elsewhere. At least, I won't be as blunt as Viaan or Vikrant."

I just let him continue, "Rynah, tell me where all did you go in the house when you had been here yesterday?"

"Nowhere like that. When Aaryan got me here, we sat in the mezzanine for some time before he was called to attend some emergency. He asked me to look around his studio. It was... It was just that I didn't know where, so I entered a random room. Only after some time, I realized that it was Viaan's office..." I felt like crying. Was that my sin to be locked up here?

"Did you see anything there? A book, a folder... a *file*?" He asked me like I was a small kid. I frowned at his sentence trying to remember something from the room, "no, I don't remember seeing anything except for the parcel through which I learned that it was Viaan's office."

He nodded approvingly before asking his final question, "did you... Did you take something from there?"

Now I scowled at him, what did they take me as? A petty thief?

"No, sir. My mother raised me better than that. I just ran out of the room as soon as I realized that it belonged to your jerk of a brother. Had I known that it was his office beforehand, I would have happily stabbed myself in the eyes than enter that damned place!"

Daksh just stared at me with raised eyebrows for a second, calculating something in his head, "I am starting to understand why Aaryan and Neel are adamant to help you. Well, I'll still tell you what I am supposed to say."

He sighed preparing to drop the bomb, "one of the most important files has gone missing from Viaan's office. And the last person to go in there was you. So, Viaan has it embedded in his head that you stole the file. If you know anything at all about it, anything at all, could save you from harsher consequences. He has thought through it and has considered to let you go even if you had taken the file. He just wants information about it."

"But I don't know anything about file!" I exclaimed feeling my sobriety slowly creeping in.

"Just try to recall, maybe you will come up with something," he got up and moved towards the door.

"And... You will have to stay here until the file is recovered. Not mine but Viaan's orders, and once Viaan says something, it shall be done," with that said he walked out leaving me gaping at the door.

But I don't even have a damn idea about what this stupid file was all about! Why in the hell would I want to steal it, first of all???

I wanted to scream and cry but right now that wasn't what I had to do, I had to get out of here. Somehow...

I stumbled up from the bed and tried the door but it was locked. As expected of them. I searched for a window to climb out but there weren't any... They only had glass walls...

I searched for anything like a phone or an intercom but came up empty-handed. I was trapped in an exotic room! And I wanted to run away from there...

I always used to wonder how things happened in people's lives, how miracles occurred, how people got into trouble. Mom always named it either as their fate or as their karma. So what do I call this? My fate or my karma?

When half a billion girls wanted to share one moment with any of the Raivardhan brothers, I was trapped in their home, trapped by them but I wanted to get out of here. Look at how sadistic the fate could be or how much of meanie was the karma.

Bravo god, bravo! Standing ovation to you and your *master plan*. I swear I will never wish for anything ever again...

And at that moment nothing else mattered. What should have mattered had flown out of the nonexistent window.

Like how Shah Rukh Khan had told in the movie Om Shanti Om, [*picture abhi baki hai mere dost, picture abhi baki hai.*](#)

But in my case, it wasn't just remaining, but the entire movie had just begun... Karma, as they say, is sweet karma in the form of a biting bitch.

15. PANDRAH

It's okay Rynah, don't back out now,

don't you dare back out now!

That was what I had been chanting in my head like it was my mantra while I looked at the door. Anytime now and they would be here. Anytime now, come on!

I held onto the biggest shower head, that I had miraculously managed to not so gently unscrew from the shower panels of nine shower heads, tightly in a baseball bat position. And waited for someone, anyone to enter. They were just going to have it from me, whether or not it was their fault. Why? Because I was pissed to an extreme extent. Why should I forgive others when they place the blame on something I had no idea upon my head?

In the same way, I didn't care who would walk in through the door. If it's a butler or a maid, sad for them, if it was Aaryan, Neel or Daksh, sad on my part but if it was one of those two assholes, Viaan or Vikrant, that would be the best thing to happen to me. I might hit them harder than what I was planning to hit others.

Someone had to come in to get me some food, it was actually around lunch. And I hoped, very optimistically that they would serve food to me too, or more likely let me give them a concussion...

The sadistic thoughts would have made me cringe before because I was never that way, but it made me delighted at the moment. My mother raised me better than this. This was all *their* fault! They made me that way by messing with my head.

Now, I was planning to mess their heads up, physically. I wasn't going to sit around here, like a plastic doll and wait for them to decide for me. I was getting out of here by hook or by crook. Like how I had initially planned, by damaging some heads. I just scowled at the door as more nasty thoughts swarmed in my mind.

Then it happened, the moment I had been waiting for more than half an hour. The doorknob turned, my heart clenched and surprisingly freezing me in my place. My brain was blank when the door opened and revealed two people standing there. I remained frozen for a split second more, and so did they. We stared at each other without uttering a word. Their eyes widened, registering what was going on here.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the jerks of the Raivardhans. Instead, these two were a young man and a woman, both in uniform and holding trays full of what I guess was food for me. And oh, I was so hungry, hungry for some blood. To their misfortune, it would be their heads I would be breaking today.

Letting out a war cry, I launched myself in their direction, the metallic shower head tight in my grasp. Their confused expressions morphed into petrified ones. The lady let out an earsplitting scream as she ran out of the room but not before dropping the tray. Well, the guy did the same, just that he more likely ran *into* the room rather than out of it.

And like a bloodthirsty vampire, I chased after him shouting, "you stay there! See what I've got to do!"

The poor lad ran across the master room to take cover behind the three-seater sofa. And I like a maniac I was, I laughed humorlessly, "what? Did you think

a sofa can save you from me?"

"W-why? Wh-what have I ever done t-to you?" The servant boy yapped incredulously.

While I should have run out of the room when I was still having the chance, I couldn't stop myself from behaving like a deranged lady. Why? Because this guy across from me looked so much like Anand that it made me want to beat him up for no reason.

It was because of that asshole of Anand, I was having such a pitiable time at the office, and because of that sexy, arrogant, son of a bastard, I was a nutcase now.

It was an entirely different topic about me being crazy right from the start, but now I had become a violent lunatic because of that handsome jerk face!

"What have you done? You are asking me, what have you done!?!?" I felt anger course through my body, "you first tell me what have I done to be locked up in here? And you are asking me what have you done! I swear I will beat you up, you rascal! This is all happening because of you!" I threatened him making his face grow paler than it already was. He had a clear question on his face unquestionably asking, 'me?'

Guess, Aaryan was right after all... I was Harley Quinn crazy.

"Rynah!" A familiar powerful voice roared from the door making me freeze for another moment.

"Sir!" The servant cried in happiness as he ran towards the door while I turned around to face the devil himself. Good, now at least I could break the head of the devil rather than a human.

Viaan waved at the servant to leave while never breaking his eye contact with

me. He had his eyebrows furrowed as we engaged in a staring competition. Save that, I was openly and defiantly scowling at him. It didn't matter how good he looked in that blue blazer.

It took me lesser time to react this time. With another war cry and a string of colorful profanities, I charged at him, ready to let the shower head kiss his forehead. Not so gently. Unlike the servants, he didn't run. Instead, he skillfully snaked his hand around my hand that held the shower head and held it away.

I tried to slap him using my other hand while my leg tried to knee him where the sun doesn't shine.

But he was too fast. It was like he had expected those moves. He blocked my attacks, caught the shower head and threw it away to let it fall with a loud clang on the floor before turning me around and lifting me off the ground by my waist. I was angry, and not being able to hurt the sexy devil made me livid.

I thrashed and hit and punched and kicked but it seemed like I was a mere child in his grip, "let me go, you bastard!" Yup, I was swearing openly at one of the most powerful men in the country, perhaps even the world. But can anyone blame me?

"Let me go!" I was full on screaming now, just wanting to damage his eardrums at the very least.

"Shut up!" He groaned as I continued to wriggle in his hold. I just did the opposite, I screamed my head off!

"For goodness sake!" He turned me around midair before pulling me flush against himself. My feet still dangling in the air. One of his arms held me like a vice, and his other hand gagged my mouth, "enough!"

It was he who had shouted now making me flinch. His voice held enough power to vibrate the air molecules around me. Well, that did a good job shutting me up.

"If you don't want to end up in an asylum after this mess, you better behave," he threatened calmly. He suddenly let go of me, making me stumble back a bit as he straightened his blazer. His eyes glaring holes into mine.

"If you cannot follow such a simple order, then I have other ways to get my work done. I don't need any more nuisance than you already are. So, behave and I shall let my brothers handle it. Or else I shall take the matter into my hands," with that said, he turned around elegantly as he had just asked for some directions from an old friend.

"Barbarian," I grumbled under my breath. He was just so barbaric! And arrogant! And jerk! And gosh!

He stopped in his track and didn't even care to look at me, "learn to hold your tongue, Ms. Kundra. It will save you a lot of trouble." And he resumed like he hadn't said a word.

I just let out an irritated scream. I so badly wanted to remove the rest of the shower heads in the house and beat the pulp out of him!

I hated him! I just hated him so much!

"I heard about your breakdown yesterday," I didn't turn to see the speaker. I didn't have to. I just continued to stare at the city out of the glass wall, still very much pissed at his brother. And even at him. It had been two days now. Two freaking days away from my family! Two freaking days since I was locked in this damn room! And this morning too, I was given another dose of tranquilizer after having a panic attack. I missed my family, I missed them

terribly...

I heard him sigh at my lack of response but what can one expect from a girl after kidnapping her? That I would talk to him, joke around and behave as if nothing was wrong? Again, who did he think I was? An angel? I felt the bed dip a little but I didn't turn to see him. It was all his fault!

If he hadn't met me at Perna's birthday, taken me to his house and introduced me to his family, I would be sleeping in my own bed right now.

"Rynah..." His voice pleaded, asking me to reply but I remained silent, so he continued, "we are doing our best in our search for the file. Anytime now and Viaan will let you go."

"Why me, Aaryan? Why did you have to meet me?" I was emotionally unstable at the moment, no matter how hard I tried to stay strong, I was a human after all.

"Why did you have to be so sweet and charming the day you met me? Why did you pay for those glasses that I broke? Why did you bring me here? Why Aaryan, why?" I was almost on the verge of another set of tears. I couldn't stay here, this wasn't my home. I wanted to go to my home.

"I am so... sorry..." Aaryan's mumble made me look at him. He looked disturbed as he continued to stare at the bed.

"I never thought this would happen to you because of me. That day we had seen you enter the mansion gate, being chased by that dog..." He started narrating the event from his point of view, "the watchmen had failed at preventing a stranger from entering the premises and it had pissed Viaan to no extent.

"He has always been the hard nut to crack when things didn't go his way. And you were the unexpected in his plan. When we first saw you and heard your

conversation over the phone, we knew it that you were different. Well, at least I did. You were something fresh for us and I thought that it wouldn't be such a big deal if we get to interact with you. Save for Viaan, I knew others would like to have a change for once. As for Viaan, he's a different case. He has always had trust issues, and I thought that sometime around you and he would eventually loosen up a bit.

"So, that day I followed you to the club even after Viaan had warned me not to. It's best for him when he is used to a few people who don't always obey his orders. And... I was right. You were different. You had no idea about us, you didn't care to hide your real self, what was in your heart was on your face. And I was impressed. I paid the bill because I wanted to, not because I had any ulterior motives. Your ankle being hurt made me want to help you, so I brought you home to let Daksh have a look at it. And I was right because even Neel and Daksh realized what I saw in you. We thought that Viaan and Vikrant will soon see it too, once they stopped being cautious and suspicious about everyone in the world."

His words rendered me speechless, they had seen me that day? Heard what I had conversed with Kush? I felt so embarrassed at the moment.

He finally looked at me, his eyes held sympathy and apology, "I am very sorry that this is happening to you, Rynah. And I promise you, I and my brothers will find that file as soon as possible and free you from this uncalled situation. I promise."

He got up and headed towards the door but not before shooting me another glance full of promise, "very soon."

And he was out. I pulled my knees into my chest, rolling myself into a ball, my tears flowed for the umptieth time. I should not give up hope now. I should remain strong, I must remain strong for myself.

It was the third day. And even today I needed a shot of tranquilizers when I had yet another panic attack...

Viaan went in and out of the room in the mornings and before going to bed, just to get a change of clothes or to collect anything he needed. We avoided each other like plague. He would simply ignore my presence like he was the only one in the room.

And I preferred it that way. If he had been any other way, I would have surely plucked the entire panel of his shower heads and beat him to death with it. Even if it would have been an impossible feat, I would have somehow accomplished it.

Another thing I noticed was none of the servants or maids ever came in through the door again. Instead, either Aaryan, Neel or Daksh got me meals and described their progress.

It was lunchtime again and Neel walked into the room with a tray. Today's menu was authentic North Indian. At least, it was something that I could name by myself...

"Thank you," I politely said taking the tray from him. He just mustered a tired smile. There were dark bags underneath every single of the Raivardhan brothers' eyes. Exhaustion flashed like a neon sign on their faces.

"When was the last time you guys slept?" I asked out of curiosity.

Neel sat down with a thoughtful expression, "we do sleep every day."

"Ah..." I hummed taking a bite of paneer from Mattar paneer before continuing, "for how many hours?"

His lips lifted for a lopsided smile, "an hour or two."

My jaw fell open, "every day?" I couldn't help but ask.

"Just for the last three days. We have been searching for that file," he looked out of the glass wall making me think about everything.

How important was this file exactly that made them search like that? What was there in the file? Guess, I would never know...

"We usually do get more than eight hours of sleep but when duty calls, nothing else matters," he added in an exhausted tone.

"You all do look like trash," I mumbled to myself making him snap his head in my way, "what did you say?"

I felt my eyes widen, did I just offended him?

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that—" he cut me off saying, "no, no, you didn't offend me. What did you say?"

"That you all look like trash?" I frowned at him. Why did he ask if he wasn't offended?

"Yes! That's it!" Suddenly Neel stood up. His face holding new hope and new determination.

"That must be it! Thanks, Rynah!" And he rushed out of the room. Making me dizzy.

What was that all about?

I shook my head and let him be. Weren't all the Raivardhans weird in their own ways?

But what I didn't know then was that Neel had just found a new lead that was the key to my freedom from this luxurious prison.

Neel on the other side rushed to Viaan's office where the rest of the Raivardhans were inspecting different things. Vikrant was looking through the system checking the CCTV footage, Aaryan was using the ultraviolet light to find any clue, Daksh was going through all the files and Viaan was searching all the hiding spots of the office for umptieth time.

"Guys! Found any new clue?" Neel walked into the room dragging everyone's attention for a split second.

"We didn't, what about you?" Daksh asked closing another file before placing it on the side.

"I think so," Neel's words made everyone in the room come to a halt, waiting for him to continue, "who checked the trash bin?"

"I did. It was empty," Viaan responded making Neel nod.

"When did you check?" Neel enquired.

"As soon as I found out that the file was missing, I checked the entire office, including the trash bin," Viaan folded his arms across his chest as he leaned his back against the bookshelf.

"You didn't find anything in the trash bin?" Neel stressed.

"Nada, it was spotless. Not a piece of paper remaining in it," Viaan confirmed.

"You didn't find anything in the trash bin, meaning the trash was taken out and the trash is usually taken out every other day and emptied in the dry trash room downstairs. Before... before it's been sent for recycling," Neel mused after he placed his theory.

"What if... Just what if—" Daksh cut Neel off completing the thought, "the

file accidentally fell into the trash bin in the morning after Viaan left the office but before the maid collected the trash and-" now Aaryan completed Daksh's sentence by interjecting, "took the file away?"

"Vikrant check the CCTV footage and see if the trash was collected that day?" Neel ordered as all the brothers crowded around the system. Vikrant rewound the footage to the start of the incident's day and played it.

The brothers watched carefully and patiently till they saw Rynah enter the room.

"No trash collection that day," Vikrant sat back looking at the paused screen. Shoulders of Neel, Daksh, and Aaryan slumped down. The hope that had formed suddenly left them.

"Unless," this time it was Viaan who looked thoughtful, "unless the garbage was collected the previous night after I left the office."

Vikrant bent forward and rewound the footage till the clip of a maid entering the room was found. She looked around the hallway before entering the room. Not very long after, she left the room with the trash but something was off about her.

"Hmmm... Suspicious, very suspicious," Aaryan commented looking at the clip, "Vikrant, please rewind to the start of the clip?"

Vikrant followed the request and replayed the clip.

"Stop!" Aaryan gushed making Vikrant pause the video.

He pointed towards the blazer of the maid saying, "there."

The Raivardhan brothers looked at what Aaryan was pointing at and saw that there was something firm and gray in color peeking from below her blazer

while she was going in. The gray color looked so much like the gray color of *the file*. And when she walked out, the gray object wasn't there anymore, instead, she carried the trash.

"I think I've seen a gray file in those sets of files," Daksh recalled.

"Well well, it looks like we've got our thief," Vikrant announced making all the Raivardhan brothers' eyes to harden. They had a suspect to catch and a file to get. And of course, how could they forget about me? They had an innocent heroine to release.

16. SOLAH

The dropping of various objects on the bed beside me caught my attention. It took me only a second to identify those objects as mine. My phone, my purse, my ID cards, all the other stuff that Viaan had confiscated.

"Here, take your things and leave," I looked up to find the owner of the voice, Viaan Raivardhan standing by the door. He was as emotionless as day one but now he was not having that coldness in his eyes nor was he glaring at me.

He turned around and walked out of the room, this time making sure to leave the door wide open.

I felt multiple emotions courses through me, like happiness, relief, joy, worry and many more, at the same time.

I was free! They set me free! The devil let me go!

That meant one thing for sure, they had found *the file*. And how did that happen? Well, let me rewind to the part that I was unaware of, at that moment at least.

Viaan had called the entire staff for a surprise meeting, making the entire

working body to gather in the garden on the second floor.

"I assume you must have heard about a crazy woman locked up in my room," Viaan started, making the workers whisper in low voices, "actually, she is being retained there instead of someone else."

He looked around the staff casually and as expected, the maid who had picked the trash on the day of the incident was missing. He submerged the urge to let his cold smirk spread over his lips, as he continued, "and as shocking as it sounds, she's been retained instead of one of you."

Gasps rose from the crowd as the staff looked at each other.

"There has been a mole in the house, stupid enough to mess with us. We have identified that mole and are informing you all so that you can share any information you have on her," Viaan nodded at Vikrant who switched the projector on, letting a clip of the trash picker to project on the outdoor screen.

"This woman here has stolen a really important file from my office. If anyone knows anything at all about her, feel free to share it with us. And you shall be rewarded if the information is authentic. Anybody?" Viaan quickly scanned over the staff.

One of the lady staff members answered in a loud voice, "we don't know much about her, Sir. Except, that her name is Arushi and she lives in Kukatpally."

Viaan nodded at her and then looked around the crowd, "anybody else?"

No one else had anything to say, so Viaan dismissed them. Everyone returned to their works, everyone except for one, a security guard. He took the elevator and headed to the basement before walking to the secluded corner of the huge parking lot, where the cars hid his moderate frame. He dialed a number, not before checking if his surroundings were clear before

whispering, "hello!"

A feminine voice replied from the other side, "what is it, Suresh?"

"Hello! Jamuna, they have recognized you. And they are very sure that you-" his words died in his throat when he lifted his head to find Viaan leaning on the pillar a few feet away on Suresh's right, removing his expensive watch.

"Hello? Hello, Suresh?" From the other side of the line, Jamuna kept calling Suresh's name but the phone had slipped from Suresh's hand and fell on the ground, with a bounce, cracking the entire screen.

Suresh's flight instincts had triggered unintentionally but when he turned to escape from the other side, Neel stood there with his hands in his pockets. His head tilted to his right as he regarded the guard. And Aaryan causally sauntered to sit on the hood of his black BMW which was parked before Suresh, cracking his knuckles.

Suresh looked around for a place to run but he was surrounded by all the possible directions. He had thought that hiding behind the monster hummer would have prevented him from getting caught but it turned out to be the other way around. Now, he couldn't escape his fate.

"S-Sir, wha—" Suresh started but he couldn't get to finish it as Viaan cut him off in the middle and asked, "why are you stammering Suresh? Did you do something wrong?"

Suresh was nervous and speechless but then he composed himself and tried to cover his anxiety with a nervous chuckle, "w-what do yo—" again he was at a loss of words when Viaan stepped closer intimidatingly as he added with a sarcastic smile, "a mistake? A sin?"

Suresh knew at once that he knew, which was bad, in fact even horrible news for him.

"So Suresh, what did you think? You could fool us?" Viaan started as he stepped in again with a cold glare, frightening Suresh to no end, so he resorted to remain silent. He didn't want to supply them with information that they didn't know, signing his own death contract.

"We already knew she had joined here with a fake identity, with some help from the insider and we also knew she wouldn't continue to work here when her job was done," he sauntered like a wild cat, taking his time and paralyzing his prey, who was trembling with fear, "we needed her real name that you just gave us. And thanks to you, we even have her location at our disposal."

Suresh broke into a cold sweat as he heard Neel answer his unanswered questions, "Vikrant had hacked your phone and had been tracing the call and Daksh was already out there hunting her down."

Viaan suddenly grabbed Suresh by his collar and pinned him against the hummer. And Suresh couldn't do anything. He was after all one against three. It would surely take a miracle to get him out of there alive.

"Now, what do we do with you, Suresh?" Viaan smirked coldly, not leaving any chance for Suresh to speak before continuing, "You don't mess with a Raivardhan. We can be worse than the Mafia itself."

Suresh was already regretting his idiotic decision of accepting that damned task.

"And you know why?" Viaan hissed on his face before continuing, "because, even our illegal doings can be easily portrayed into a legal one, we can get away even with murder. Because *we* know how to bend *the law*."

Suresh started shivering visibly because he knew what Viaan had told was true, no one messed with a Raivardhan unless they had a death wish. And his greed for money made him stand before the death's door. The brothers being

in every important field gave them enough hold to manipulate any situation.

The ringing of the mobile phone broke the tense silence. Aaryan answered the call and put it on the loudspeaker, "I have her." It was Daksh. He ended the call just after those three words making Viaan smirk wider while his eyes blazed with anger. That was the cue for Suresh to gulp loudly. He swore he wouldn't be surprised if he peed in his pants at the moment.

"As much as I want to kill you on the spot. Since we have the party directly involved in the activity, I shall let you go. So that you can deliver a message to *your* master," with that Viaan took out his pistol with a silencer from his back and shot one of Suresh's knees without even looking down, making him cry in agony.

"This will let you remember for the rest of your life to *not shit where you eat*," with that he shot Suresh's another knee too letting him fall on the ground.

Viaan turned sideways ready to leave but stopped as he added, "I think killing you would be a better message than letting you live without legs."

He turned around and aimed his gun on Suresh's forehead making Suresh beg Viaan in panic, "n-no, no, s-sir. I w-won't say th-this to anyone! I-I-I will go far a-away from here a-after delivering y-your message. I-I have little kids, s-sir. P-please have mercy o-on me."

"Then deliver him this message. *He* needs to be much better than this to match with us. And... If I hear about you or find you anywhere around radii of ten miles from any of our properties, your kids shall visit your grave," Viaan put his wayfarers on as he put his gun back and got into Aaryan's BMW Z4, ready to drive out after commanding, "clean this shit up."

Neel and Aaryan nodded their heads as they proceeded to do what they were masters at - clearing all the traces of Suresh from their building.

Viaan headed to the warehouse where Daksh and their other men had kept the captured Jamuna, alias Arushi. The female agents of the group had held her. Her cheeks had hand impressions embossed on them and her eyes were bloodshot with tears.

Daksh stood a few feet away from them with a poker face. He was bored, that was for sure, so he focused on the latest article that covered his tablet screen. When Viaan drove in, Jamuna literally broke down in fear. The public had only seen the good side of the Raivardhans, thanks to Aaryan, but the people who messed with the Raivardhans knew the other side, their dangerous, dark side. They had sent many to hospitals and even more to the grave. However, nobody knew about that, or would ever know.

With the power, money, name, fame, and brains, they handled both the legal and the illegal side of their tasks just as skillfully as they posed before the audience. They could make a person disappear without a trace that even a dog couldn't track him down, or sentence him for non-bailable lifetime imprisonment for no reason, and legally. Just as Viaan had said, they could be worse than mafia itself.

Viaan walked up to Jamuna, the female agents clearing the path for him as he stopped before her. Like he had all the time in the world, he slowly removed the wayfarers and looked at her calmly but his calmness was not in sync with his eyes. His eyes were cold to the extent of the danger. He knelt on one knee before the fallen figure of Jamuna's, one of his elbow resting over his knee and holding the wayfarers.

"Did you retrieve the file?" He asked looking at her but the question was directed to Daksh.

"I have," he answered just as monotonously as Viaan. Nodding his head, Viaan focused at the terrified girl before him, "what did you think? It would be easy to steal from us without getting caught?"

He looked away giving a short chuckle as if it entertained him, "you must either be very stupid or extremely overconfident to think that you will get out of it just like that. Or was it the amount that *he* was offering you?"

Jamuna opened and closed her mouth a few times unable to say anything due to shock.

"Though I know everything about what you have done and how you did it, I still want to hear it from your very own mouth. Let's see how smart you are, and how honest," Viaan smirked taking out his pistol and inspecting it like it was just another plain toy. Blood drained from Jamuna's face at the sight of the pistol. She could do anything to save her life. So, she started to stutter, "I-I was approached by a m-man t-three months ago. H-he gave m-me a big s-sum of money m-making want to e-earn more. And h-he was willing t-to pay more, j-just wanted me t-to do a l-little job of his. I-I-I had to replace a f-file, and ta-take the o-original to him.

"I-I worked more t-than two weeks to f-find that file. T-Then worked to get another file with s-similar outer cover. Observed y-y-your routines and one night sw-swaped it. Su-Suresh helped me get in and o-out of there for half the profit and I w-was supposed to meet t-the guy who w-wanted that file yes-yes-yesterday but he never came... Then y-you found me..."

Her face was tear-stained and her eyes were again filled with more. It was easy to see how scared she was.

Viaan just stared at her to continue but when she didn't show any sign of it, he asked, "did you see the man who wanted you to steal the file?"

"N-no, he always had a helmet on," she shook her head. Viaan remained cool as he got up. He no longer had any use for her. Just when he stood to his full height, the echo of a couple of footsteps dragged everyone's attention except for the two Raivardhans.

The men in khaki stopped in the middle of the warehouse, waiting for someone to speak.

Viaan pulled out a little voice recorder from his pocket and pressed a button. And Jamuna's confession started all over again, but this time from the voice recorder, "*I-I was approached by a m-man t-three months ago.*" He pressed another button ending it right over there.

Jamuna's eyes were saucer wide as she registered what had just happened. Viaan threw the voice recorder towards the police and put back his wayfarers on, before telling in a stern voice, "take her away and make sure she doesn't come out at least ten years."

Jamuna let out a loud sob as Viaan's words registered to her.

The police caught Jamuna and handcuffed her before dragging her away while Jamuna was crying all the time. She was lucky that Viaan had let the officials handle her, if it would have been him, she would have been crippled like Suresh. But since she was a girl, and the morals of the Raivardhans didn't allow them to raise their hands over the females, she suffered less.

He patiently watched the police take her away while prioritizing his next task in his head, that would be setting me free.

On the other side, tears were staining my face as I tried to sleep. After Neel left, no one else entered the room, so I calmly finished my lunch in silence. It wasn't like I could talk to the walls...

I felt lonely and homesick again. I was missing Anjali and her talks, my friends and even Luv and Kush. Everyone must have been so worried about me...

Well, that was until Viaan threw my things on the bed and said those golden words, "Here, take your thing and leave."

At first, I thought that I was having a delusion but then, holding my things in my hand, I knew I wasn't.

And I needn't be told twice, I wiped my tears and ran out of the room like I had turned into Usain Bolt. The staff working around looked at me like I was crazy but I didn't give a poop about it. All that mattered to me now was getting the hell out of here.

I cried and beamed like a fool. I didn't stop to even look around, thereby missing the fact that the Raivardhan brothers just saw me run down their hallway like the crazy lady they called me.

The three rational brothers according to me, Aaryan, Neel, and Daksh would have approached me and talked. But the guilt that they felt at the moment towards me, prevented them from doing so. Looking at me happily running out of here, made them all come to a decision. They were going to stay away from my life because their interference had just proved to be hazardous for me. And their conscience would chew them alive if something else like that happened again.

They concluded that our worlds were different and keeping me and Viaan away would be healthy for everyone. So they decided to never approach me again.

On the other hand, I had the same thoughts buzzing through my head. Though I was kept captive here for no reason, though Viaan treated me like a culprit, the three other brothers who worked hard for my release at least deserved my respect. Though, I swore never to cross paths with the Raivardhans ever again. I have had enough dose of Viaan's barbaric arrogance for my entire lifetime, and if someone even paid me a billion dollars to spend five more minutes with him, I would happily strangler the person who would propose such an absurd idea.

I was at the main gates, crying out of joy. I had never thought I would be

crying with happiness looking at these gates. But here I was. The watchmen didn't utter a sound as I rushed past them, out of the damned, exotically luxurious mansion. I didn't even caring to notice a posh white car pulling into the parking lot. A car that had just arrived with a person who was going to be responsible for what was going to happen soon...

I rushed to Anjali's home and rang the doorbell but nobody answered for some time. I wiped my tears as a goofy grin spread over my lips while I waited. Just as I was about to turn away and search for a cab, the door opened and a shocked, "Rynah?" Escaped from a familiar mouth.

I turned around and beamed at my aunt widely before engulfing her into a hug while she remained in absolute shock.

Oh! How much I missed her!

The damage that had already done wasn't known to me, yet. I was oblivious to the silence that had come before the storm, a storm that was going to hit me hard, drench me completely, and drown me without asking for my part of the story. I was yet to realize the pun that my fate was playing. Because once the fate was sealed, it didn't care to ask for our opinion, nor our permission.

I was just so happy to be reunited with my family again that I had completely missed the fact that the miserable time that I had thought was over, was not quite yet. It was yet to begin.

17. SATRAH

Anjali stared at me for a whole minute like she wasn't able to believe what she was seeing.

"Hey?" I bit my lower lip not knowing what else to say. She broke free from her trance as she rushed forward and engulfed me in a hug. Aunt Lasika was making calls to all the reachable family members, who had been searching for me for three days now.

Anjali's tears were wetting my top but the joy of meeting her again was just so much that I couldn't control my own. We don't know for how long we stood like that, crying onto each other's shoulder. I just knew we stood there till our feet turned numb.

She withdrew to look at me, her eyes still glistening with tears, "wherein the hell were you? Do you know how worried we had been? We searched the entire bloody city for you!"

"Anjali I-" I had only opened my mouth to explain when more people came running into the living room.

The first one was my mom who was sobbing uncontrollably, beside her was my aunt who was also crying. My mom didn't wait as she started hitting me with her small hands, "you imbecile, have you any idea what you put me and rest of your family through? Do you know your dad had an angina attack? Do you know we didn't even know where we should search for you or what to

do?"

I let her beat me not being able to voice out anything. I was in a shock listening to the news about my father experiencing an angina attack... And the guilt gnawed me on the inside.

She then grabbed me and pulled me into a tight hug as she wept harder, "my baby, my child."

I saw blurry images of Luv and Kush entering the house, followed by my dad and uncle Adarsh.

My dad, I missed my dad so much. The fact that he had an angina attack made me cry at his sight.

"Daddy!" I whimpered as I withdrew from my mom just to hug my dad. It was for the first time in my life that I had seen tears in his eyes. He hugged me tightly as he quietly cried on my shoulder.

I had failed to notice the new presence while seeking the comfort of my father.

"Where had she been all this time?" A high pitched voice inquired sharply like I was a thief caught red-handed.

My dad withdrew to look at the source, so did I. At that moment, I don't know why but my soon-to-be mother-in-law looked like the typical monster-in-law from the daily soap. That sharp accusing look, like she knew something that I hid. And she was adamant to make me confess. Beside her stood her son, Ravi who looked at me with a distant look.

I hadn't noticed that every single pair of eyes were on me, wanting to know the answer, but I had none. What was I supposed to say that the arrogant jerk Viaan Raivardhan kidnapped me for a damned file? And who would believe

me? Anyone with a sane mind would say that if a file went missing from the Raivardhan house, they would approach the police like normal people and not hold a girl captive who had no connection with the damned file. And their status, money, and power were enough to shut any government official's mouth without any complications, not to forget that Neel was a lawyer. So pressing any charges against them would only cause Viaan to slander my family in public. It would be a one-sided massacre of our reputation.

Just getting out of there was enough for me. I so did not want to interfere with them again, now having enough idea what that lunatic was capable of. So as long as no severe harm was done to me, it was alright, right? Especially, when Aaryan, Neel, and Daksh did so much to help me out of that situation. Wasn't it my duty to not bring shame to their names?

Not for Vikrant, definitely not at all for Viaan, but for the rest of the three brothers, I kept mum.

"Where were you Rynah?" This time, it was my dad who asked. The emotions swirled in his eyes.

"Daddy..." I whispered unable to say anything else after that. I sure didn't want my parents to feel humiliated before anyone.

"Why aren't you telling Rynah? Or you can't tell your dark deeds?" Ravi's mother sarcastically voiced her opinion.

"For god's sake, don't inculcate my daughter erroneously!" my mother stood beside me pulling me into her side.

"Don't be so proud of your daughter's upbringing. The apple has rotten a long time ago just didn't smell yet," she added with a snark before throwing a poisonous look at me while I just stared at her dumbstruck. What was she even talking about?

She had been so sweet the other day and even after that. It was utterly shocking to see the ugly side of hers.

"What is wrong with you, Auntie? Why are you talking like I've committed some sin?" I couldn't just control my mouth as I asked her in shock.

"Rynah, adults are talking. Let us handle this," my father warned me before turning towards Anjali, "take her to your room, Anjali."

Anjali nodded wordlessly before moving towards me but Ravi's mother had others thoughts, "why? So that you can hide all her immoralities from the world?"

"Don't you dare accuse my daughter like that! I know her better than others!" My dad shouted glaring at Ravi's mother. Anjali tried to take me away from there but I pulled myself away from her hold, wanting to hear what more Ravi and his mother had to tell.

"If you know your daughter that well, then you must also know that she is nothing but a slut! Who just warms the bed of different men every night!"

Her poisonous words shocked me to the core. I froze in my place, my mouth ajar. The first tear rolled down, followed by another and another. How much hate did she harbor towards me?

A slut, really? Was that how they saw me as, a slut?

I had never imagined that the mother of the man I was going to marry in a few months saw me as something that low.

Was she the same woman who had been so sweet to me when they came with their proposal? Was she the same soon-to-be mother-in-law that smiled at me when blessing me during the unofficial engagement? I couldn't believe my eyes or ears.

"Mrs. Saluja!" My dad screamed in warning but what actually broke my heart was Ravi who shouted in counter, "Mr. Kundra!"

He had been looking bitter the entire time like he had swallowed a ton of Indian lilac leaves.

"Ravi..." My shocked whisper didn't go unnoticed by him. He walked up to me, holding my upper arms as he shook me roughly and shouted on my face, "why don't you tell them, Rynah? Why don't you tell me? Why does your entire office speak about you being in a relationship with *Mr. Aaryan Raivardhan* the *Rock star*? How many people can lie Rynah? One? Two? Or an entire office? And why would they lie? Why did you leave a rich man like him to marry me? Why doesn't he marry you? And how many others do you go out with? Men must be swarming around you whenever you go out! Tell me I'm lying when I say that you were in the Raivardhan mansion for the three days? Tell me, that you aren't coming here from there! Tell me, go on, tell me!"

"I..." I opened my mouth to justify but couldn't continue. The shock was too great to overcome.

"Is that true Rynah? Is it true that you were in the Raivardhan mansion all this time?" The stern voice of my father made me look at him. His face was serious but his eyes held fear. I had no idea about how to answer their question, what to answer in fact. Was I to tell the truth or lie to them?

For the second time that night, all eyes were focused solely on me, waiting for me to accept or deny the claim.

"Answer me!?! " My father shouted making me blurt out the first thing on my mind, which was truth, "Y-yes..."

The realization hit me later on when my mother's hands slipped off my shoulder and she fell on the floor, weeping loudly.

Mrs. Saluja looked smug like she had just won a war and Ravi stepped away from me, looking like a stranger on the side of the road. My dad had frozen in his place as hurt reflected on his face.

Ravi's mother, Mrs. Saluja eyed me disgustedly, "we officially break this engagement right here. You can do whatever you want with your daughter but we don't want to do anything with her. No wonder nobody wanted to marry her even when she is so beautiful and at a good position. Everyone in the city knew about her reputation."

My world stopped at her words. *They were breaking the engagement? The only man who I had thought of spending the rest of my life with, who I had considered to be that someone that would have kept me happy for the rest of my life, was breaking up with me?*

My father turned around slapping me, "why did I have to have you like my daughter? Why did you have to do this to us? What did we lack in your upbringing that you put our name to shame like this?" He hit me once more as he cried. Luv and Kush pulled him away from me to prevent him from hitting me anymore.

"Mrs. Saluja, I am sorry on my daughter's behalf, she is still a child. Please don't make hasty decisions and ruin her life," my father literally joined his hands before her begging her to reconsider. I cried harder losing all the control.

Mrs. Saluja raised her hand stopping my father's pleading, "reconsider to take *her* as my daughter-in-law? Are you mad? Thank goodness, we found out about this before it was too late. Nobody who knows what she is will ever marry her in entire India. It would be better if you threw her into the ocean and forget that you had a daughter like her. Maybe then someone may consider marrying your second daughter, else both of them will be sitting in your house for the rest of their lives."

With that, she and Ravi walked out of the house without a glimpse of regret. I felt like dying, it left like my life was over. I wanted to follow her advice and jump into the ocean so that my family doesn't face any more humiliation.

My dad stepped back, his hand on his chest and pain on his face, "ah..." we saw him slowly falling making us freeze in our places with shock for a brief second before we rushed to his side!

"Daddy!"

Luv and Aadarsh uncle held my dad up. He had a heart attack and it scared the shit out of us.

The doctors and nurses rushed in and out of the operation theater while I and Anjali sat opposite to it. Kush had fetched Ritika from home, who was now bawling her eyes out on my mother's lap, while my mother had just fallen asleep over my aunt's shoulder, weeping. Anjali held my hand and intervened our fingers for moral support while I felt completely numb unable to feeling anything. I felt so empty that even the depression that had set in felt like numbness over my body.

I continued to stare at the wall, refusing to speak to anyone regarding anything. Aadarsh uncle and Anjali's brothers stood by the end of the corridor discussing something.

Finally, the OT door opened and the head surgeon came out, still instructing the nurse who was following him with a notepad.

"Doctor?" Everyone stood up except my aunt over whose shoulder my mom slept.

"He is out of danger now and should be gaining consciousness soon. Who

can I discuss the other information and formalities with?" The surgeon looked around until Aadarsh uncle reply, "with me please."

They both walked towards where the doctor wanted to discuss the details. I sat back down sighing in relief. At least my father was okay. I leaned my head back and closed my eyes to relax a bit. Today's events flashed through my head causing fresh tears slip from the side of my eyes.

I was shaken awake by my mother, "Rynah..." her eyes had lost their usual light. She suddenly looked ten years older than her age, her childish nature and youthful radiance, all gone...

She looked so dull and dead as a zombie. Her voice was monotonous. It took my malfunctioning mind to realize that I had fallen asleep. I sat up straighter to let her know that I was awake.

She withdrew and looked distant, "your father wants to talk to you."

I got up and followed her down the hall towards the ICU where my father had been shifted to. My head not registering anything else just that I was following my mother to meet my father. I felt just as dead as she looked. She opened the door of a room and all sorts of machines came into view and my father laying there in the middle of those machines.

His oxygen mask formed a small fog inside it whenever he exhaled. His heartbeat steady on the monitor.

"R-Rynah..." His voice was hoarse making me rush towards him, "daddy."

He turned towards me and raised his hand, "Rynah... My daughter."

I held his hand as tears blurred my vision at the sight of his weak and vulnerable condition.

"I'm here, I'm right here," I comforted him making him continue, "promise me, Rynah. P-promise me something."

"Yeah, I promise you. Whatever you ask, I promise you that. I promise you, daddy!"

"I want you to leave the j-job and marry the man I-I select for you. I need you to trust me," he took a ragged breath causing my heart to clench. I and he both knew what he was asking of me.

"Daddy, I didn't-" he interjected me, "I know. My daughter can never be something that those wretched people say. I trust my upbringing enough to know what my children are." He coughed as he ended the sentence. He still had faith in us when he was humiliated to no end. He still believed in us, in me. I cried out of joy for the faith he had in me.

After recovering, he continued, "I trust you but the world only believes in rumors, no matter what you say. Before what Mrs. Saluja had accused spreads around, I want you to be already settled in your life. Maybe not what you actually expected your life partner to be but I need you to trust me. I will only choose the best among the available proposals."

I just cried on his chest not knowing what to do. He knew what he was asking of me was my dreams, my life, so that I may not live like this. Even though I may not know the man I marry, have no idea about him, or not like him, he might not even be up to my expectations but at least my sister would get a chance for a happier life, better than mine. I felt my mother's arms wrap around both of us, as she too cried at our situation.

I trusted my dad. The only thing that angered and depressed me was the fact that whatever happened in my life didn't affect even an ounce to the bastard who was responsible for this.

I had lost so much in less than a week. I had lost my job, my fiance, my hope,

my reputation, my family's reputation and my chance for happiness. I had almost lost my father but looks like god wasn't so merciless towards me. Though all this happened, I still had my parents who still loved and believed in me. We were in this together.

And yet I didn't bring shame to *his* name as *he* had brought disgrace upon mine just because of a stupid file! I had done nothing at all to *him*, yet had endured *his* anger and torture. Why was I still not speaking about *his* involvement? Why was I still protecting *him*?

Nothing would have changed in *their* lives while mine went down the hill. And this was all happening because of one guy, Viaan Raivardhan, who I was never going to forgive, ever!

18. ATHAARAH

As the seconds ticked by, my heart dropped further and further into my stomach. The upshot of my life was getting sealed outside this room.

Anjali held my one hand while Prerna held the other, giving a gentle squeeze to soothe my nerves. It had been two weeks, one whole week after my father got discharged from the hospital. One whole week since he started to hunt a groom for me without a pause. One whole week since I last thought of anything else other than the humiliation that we lived through. One week since I spoke anything other than the necessary quantity.

Whoever came to see me, turned me down right on my face. And no, it didn't hurt me, what hurt me more was seeing my parents hurt and anxious. In the span of a week I had been rejected for eighteen times. Seeing the rejection up front all the time did reduce my self-esteem to a great extent. It turned out that the guys only came to see what kind of girl I was and to comment over my family rather than considering me as an eligible candidate. That was the reason my dad restrained from showing me to them until a party who was really interested in me arrived...

Ritika slowly opened the door, her shoulders slumped already dreading our hearts. She looked at me sadly as she shook her head.

Another rejection... Looks like nobody wanted to marry me. The only option that remained for me seemed like jumping off from a bridge as Mrs. Saluja had suggested. It might have looked really silly for anyone out of the subcontinent, even I had the same thoughts before this happened to me. I always thought, 'did they really do that? Like being that bitchy and asshole-ish?' But now I knew the answer, these things existed in India. It was typical Indian belief that a girl should be a virgin when she's married if she was associated with any other guy before marriage, she gets labeled as a characterless, immoral slut. And once any girl is given that designation, no one would want to marry her. The very narrow mindedness of some parts of Indian society, I know. And it was just in recent years that even love marriage was treated equally as an arranged marriage. Else, there were only arranged marriages while love marriage was frowned upon...

Ritika walked out of the room, leaving me with my friends. It was very obvious on my face, I had lost all hopes and was numb as day one. I knew it very well, I was slowly losing it. I don't know for how long I could go on like this. I was fighting for something I no longer could see. Knowing that I could never achieve any of my dreams, yet I continued to hold on, just for my parents.

"Rynah, everything is going to alright. Everything will be fine," Perna placed her hand over my shoulder trying to comfort me.

"Yeah, you are a strong fighter. You cannot lose hope like this!" Anjali agreed, slightly squeezing my hand again.

"Nothing is going to be okay... I just know it, the most will be me getting married, for the sake of my family... And *he* will go on as if nothing has happened," I gritted the last words through my teeth. The mere thought of *his* name made me angry.

"*He?* Who is that, Rynah? What are you hiding from us?" Perna asked.

"Yeah, you never told us about what exactly happened..." Anjali added thoughtfully. I don't know if it was the anger or depression or sadness or what, but at the moment some courageous person's spirit possessed me and made me blurt out everything. The girls looked shocked and their disbelief only increased as they heard line after line that left my mouth. I tried not to cry but then I couldn't tolerate it anymore and burst out into tears.

Anjali pulled me into a gentle embrace as she and Perna tried to calm me down.

"We will go to the police, get the media and get you justice," Anjali's voice held anger.

"Yeah, and we will make sure they will pay for it," Perna added.

I withdrew to look at them through teary eyes, still sniffing, "I love you both very much but you are going to do no such thing."

"What?"

"Why?" Both of them asked in surprised voices.

I looked at them seriously, before putting forth my thoughts, "when he held me, hostage, it was clear that they were no saints. In fact, they would be much better villains than the ones in the movies. So, when we do accuse them of what they did to me, it's obvious that they will naturally deny the claim. They will make the ends meet, or not even care to look up, knowing people always cause rumors about people like them to gain attention..."

I could see that they were absorbing all the facts I was listing, making me continue, "it would just make my parents more stressed than they already are. It would just broadcast my name on the TV telling everyone what happened with me, making the chances of me getting married even lower than it already is... Not even effecting anything in their usual lives. This must be something

that happened every other day to them, and I am pretty much sure they are perfectly well versed in handling such situations."

The smile on my lips was a bitter one. Understanding dawned on their faces knowing where I was coming from.

"Rynah?" The door opened a little, letting my dad peep in.

He looked at my company and asked, "come out for a second, will you?"

I nodded before following him outside. He walked into the dining room and sat down, making me mirror his action.

His stance was defeated causing anxiety to engulf me. I subconsciously started playing with the hem of my tunic top.

"What is it, Daddy?" I asked looking at him hesitate. He looked at me before sighing, "Rynah, I don't know how to break this to you, my child... The last hope that I had, went away today..."

"Apparently, someone has been spreading around the rumors and whoever had sent a proposal, withdrew it... Except for..."

He became silent all of a sudden and looked away making me more anxious.

"Except for?" I asked hesitantly.

Looking at my dad who couldn't see me in the eye, my mom placed her hands over my shoulder.

"Rynah, trust me. He is a really sweet guy and will give you everything that you deserve. And he is the only one who hasn't withdrawn his proposal to marry you, no matter the rumors. And if he still accepts to marry you, we shall get all the preparations done within two days. That way, no one will poison his mind too. He was the only eligible proposal anyway. So, I guess

we haven't lost a lot. Though we had hoped for more, for you—" I cut my mom's blabbering which she always did whenever she was nervous, asking, "who is he?"

She either ignored or didn't hear me as she continued, "I and your father shall go to him tomorrow and accept the proposal. Time shouldn't be wasted in good deeds—" I cut her off for the second time asking her the same question, "who is that person, mom?" Though I already had a sinking feeling in my heart.

Both of my parents fell quiet, not having enough courage to disclose it to me.

"Who is it?" I asked as the first tear fell from my eyes, rolling down my cheek even before I heard his name.

"Surya Kanth Nath..." My father said it with embarrassment shadowing his features. The second tear fell, marking my defeat.

"Arrange the wedding within a day. Make it small and simple, we don't have many relatives and friends," with that I got up, leaving both of my parents in shock as I walked back to my room where Anjali and Prerna were talking about something.

As soon as I walked in, they detected the change in my mood.

"What happened?" Anjali asked.

"What did your dad say?" Prerna enquired.

I forced a smile at them, "say congrats girls, your friend is getting married." And right there, I couldn't hold it back as I broke into a silent sob. I couldn't let my parents worry about me or the decision I had made for their happiness. I locked the door and slid down sobbing softly while Prerna and Anjali rushed to console me. They pulled me into a group hug, letting me weep my

heart out.

It wasn't wrong to say that I was half dead already, the numbness seeped into me once again, making everything around me blurry and unimportant. I didn't even realize when the girls tugged me in the bed and left me alone, for the sleep had swallowed me.

At that time I had no idea about what these stupid, crazy but my lovely soul sisters, Prerna and Anjali, were going to do. While I was deep in slumber, unaware of anything going around, Prerna and Anjali enquired with my parents about my groom-to-be and found out that it was none other than Mr. Surya Kanth Nath.

To say they were angry would not do any justice. They had turned into fire-breathing dragons. Around three in the afternoon, they walked out of my house. Why? Because their wicked brains had formulated a plan that could either knock some fear into the Raivardhans or put these two idiots behind the bars. I still doubt that anything could scare the Raivardhans...

Sharp at half past four, Prerna and Anjali stood before the other gate of the Raivardhan mansion, not the one from where Anjali's family could witness the entire show. Two huge sacks resting beside them as the watchmen looked at them skeptically.

Wiping the sweat off their forehead, Anjali and Prerna bent down picking up the first object from the sacks that their hands found and threw them in the air before catching them. The eyes of the three watchmen widened drastically before Anjali and Prerna let out a war cry and started throwing palm-sized stones at the gate and the watchman's cabin.

"You sleazy bitches! Take this, you!" Anjali picked another stone and threw it.

"Shame on your existence! How can security let a girl remain captive here for

three damn days?" Prerna threw another stone.

The glass cabin of the watchmen was bulletproof but that didn't stop the watchmen inside from jumping and flinching while anticipating the stones to hit them, every time they were thrown.

As the insanity proceeded with the girls shouting profanities, throwing stones, grabbing almost every pedestrian's attention and scaring the watchmen inside the cabin, the watchmen called for help. There was no other go since the girls practiced aiming, keeping the watchmen as targets whenever they tried to get out of the cabin.

"Get out I say! You epitome of cowardice!" Prerna shouted at the watchmen, burning full of rage.

And right at that time, as if the lord had mercy upon the watchmen by listening to their silent prayers, the gate opened revealing row bodyguards who were fully armed. The bulky physique of the bodyguards and the cold as ice faces made Anjali and Prerna think twice before throwing another stone at them. They looked ready to tackle down anyone that threatened, or perhaps even shoot if needed. They were just waiting for one wrong move for the girls to make.

"Back down boys," a higher pitch of the new voice suggested it was too high for it to be a man's voice grabbed the girls' attention. The row of bodyguards parted like the red sea under Moses's staff, letting a poised and beautiful woman walk towards them. There was no sign of fear or hesitation on her face. Her eyes were tender yet piercing. Something about her radiated power all around her.

She was very beautiful for her age and her fashion sense was just as remarkable. She was neither overdressed nor underdressed. She was just perfect.

She came to stand before the girls, her bodyguards right behind her to react quickly if something went wrong.

"Who are you two? And why are you stoning my house?" She asked with the air of authority, her eyes narrowing slightly. There was confidence in the way her voice modulated, and elegance showed through her high pitch that sounded more like the bells chiming.

"Your house?" To say that the girls were confused would be apt to say as they stared at the beautiful woman who came out of the Raivardhan mansion and claimed it to be hers.

"Yes, my house. I am Asha Raivardhan, mother of all the Raivardhans," she announced without a miss like it was usual for her to say that. There wasn't any pride or ego in her tone or her features.

Hearing her words, the girls were shocked as they opened and closed their mouths several times. She looked at both the girls and asked, "now, will you care to enlighten me why did you scare my watchmen like that?"

"I... I..." Anjali was still very much shocked to form any coherent sentence while Perna's bulb lit up, "it's what your son did with my friend, ma'am."

That caught Asha's attention making Perna continue, "your son, Viaan."

That made Asha's eyes widen for a split of a second before they narrowed at them, "why don't you tell me about it over a cup of tea?"

That made the girls exchange looks before nodding.

The only sound that prevailed in the room was sipping the tea and clattering of the cups over saucers.

The girls had spilled out every little detail that they knew about the incident, without holding anything back and Asha listened to them patiently.

It had been over an hour since Anjali and Perna were invited into the Raivardhan mansion. And though they were angry, it still didn't prevent them from gawking at the interiors.

Even while they had a little silent tea party with Asha, they were admiring the Raivardhan taste in decors. What broke them out of the trance was the hurried footsteps towards the dining room where they had been seated.

The first one to come into sight was none other than the devil himself, Viaan Raivardhan. He knelt by his mom, holding one of her hands as he placed another hand of his over her cheek, gently.

"Mother, are you alright?" He asked in a ragged voice like he rushed his way to his mother. The girls were surprised to see his tenderness towards Asha, while she looked at her son and asked in a stern voice, "is it true that you had held a girl captive here for three days?"

Viaan composed himself as he turned to narrow his eyes at Anjali and Perna who sat there not a few feet away from him.

"Viaan... I asked you something," Asha's voice had been as tender as she had been with the girls whenever she interacted with them.

Viaan exhaled in annoyance, yet his voice was gentle and polite, "yes, I did."

Girls were shocked to still hear that tenderness in his tone, they had expected him to yell at them or perhaps even threaten them.

"And did you care to find out what happened to her after you let her go?" Asha had posed another question to her son.

As if on cue, the other Raivardhan brothers skidded to halt from wherever they had been, just to witness the conversation between Asha and Viaan.

"No, I didn't," his blunt honesty let disappointment spread over Asha's features when she heard her son's reply, "I could expect this from Vikrant but not from you, Viaan. Your one impulsive decision ruined four lives..."

Her words caught all the other Raivardhan brothers (except Vikrant) off-guard.

"Four lives?" Aaryan posed the question that had been burning in the heads of all the Raivardhan brothers.

"Yes, four lives. First is the father of the girl, who had spent his entire life dedicated to his family, only to find out that one of his precious daughters went missing for three days. He had an angina attack followed by a heart attack within a span of a week..."

"Second is her mother, who lost her hope, her light and died inside when her daughter was judged and criticized because she was missing for three days, before witnessing her daughter's fiance breaking off the engagement.

"Third one is her little sister, who will have a hard time finding herself a suitor because nobody would want to marry a sister of the girl about whom the entire city spread the rumors of being characterless."

Asha got up from her chair and walked towards the glass wall making Viaan stand up as she continued, "the last but not the least, the girl herself. Think what she might have gone through when she was kept hostage here for no reason, when let out, she was categorized as slut for disappearing for three days, blamed and judged for not getting proper marriage proposals, getting her engagement broken and forced to get married to a man more than double of her age."

She turned to look at her sons, "and the irony is that she hasn't muttered a word about you and what you did with her. She kept her silence, enduring all that by herself just because she didn't want to be ungrateful towards your brothers who had helped her. When she couldn't bear it anymore, she shared her pain with these two girls here, yet asked them not to breathe a word about it."

The men silently listened to what she had to say, so Asha continued, "but why do think that these girls are here? Because they were plotting a plan? A scam? No, they are here because that girl over there is dying inside. To keep her family's leftover reputation, to let her parents look into other people's eyes when they talk, to let her sister have a better chance at life than she did, she sacrificed herself and agreed to marry a man who has one of his legs in his grave."

"But tell me, does she deserves it? What sin has she committed to be punished this way? What was her fault that she had to endure all of this? Can you forgive yourselves for making four innocent lives suffer without a cause?" Asha questioned her sons, yet her voice never left the tenderness of a mother.

She walked up to Viaan and placed her hand over his cheek making him look at her, "I know you are a mature adult and capable of making your own decisions. I am not going to force you into doing anything if you don't want to do it. I can only hope that you will mend the damage you have caused."

She smiled at Viaan tenderly, "everyone can leave now, except you, Vikrant."

And as she had dismissed everyone, everyone left, even the girls while Vikrant stayed behind.

When everyone was out of earshot, Asha turned to her son, Vikrant, "I shall respect whatever Viaan decides, and I know he will not let me down. But in case his conscience doesn't work in the favor of the girl, I expect you to

marry her."

Vikrant just nodded at his mother's wish, "whatever you want mother."

Asha smiled at Vikrant as she slightly patted his cheek in pride, "now go. I shall not tardy you of whatever task you have."

Vikrant nodded once again before walking out of the room.

What happened in the Raivardhan mansion that day, was kept in the mansion for the time being. Because soon the world was getting a surprise, a big surprise, especially me...

19. UNNEES

The music of [shehnais](#) filled the background. Guests were still arriving at the venue. My house wasn't very big to host a wedding and accommodate a lot of guests, so my parents had rented a banquet hall for the day. I didn't know how big or small it was, nor did I know how good it was to look at or even shabby. I didn't even know how many people had gathered around me.

Giggles of girls reached my ears, their teasing and praises filled the air but none of them were being deciphered by my brain. I sat there as if I was at a funeral. My funeral...

The happy environment wasn't inducing any feelings in me. My mood must have been contiguous, or perhaps not, because I could see my mother talk animatedly to one of the guests just outside the room. But it didn't matter to me...

I had turned numb to that extent.

I had been in the same condition even the previous evening when the [Sangeet](#)

and [mehandi](#) had been performed. Even this morning when the [haldi](#) had been conducted... I don't remember anything from those events either. Most of the time, I was grieving and lost in my thoughts. I remember absolutely nothing... Nor did I want to.

My hair was being tied up into a messy bun and a [maangtikka](#) was placed over my hair part line.

"You are looking absolutely stunning," the lady who was dressing me up whispered above my ear with an adoring smile. I just stared back at the reflection of the girl who looked like me. She was clothed in traditional red [ghagra](#), the commonly used wedding dress by Indians, adorned with gold jewelry and red and white colored bangles. A red veil covered half of her head, her make-up done with perfection. Her lips were beautifully red yet they weren't smiling. But her eyes... Her eyes were swollen and puffy, they showed the sorrow that rested within her, they even looked dead to an extent...

I felt a new hand over my shoulder but I didn't care to see who it was.

"You may go now, we will take care of her," Prerna's voice reached my ears but not my soul.

Anjali and Prerna took their seats beside me. They were both well dressed and looking beautiful.

"Rynah, you don't have to worry. If he does something funny, we will deal with him," Anjali tried to comfort me making me wonder what even could Mr. Surya Kanth Nath probably do to me? The most he could do was pull out an asthma pump and take a wisp out of it. Immediately at that thought, my heart clenched and depression set in.

Just like Luv and Kush used to tease me, I was going to make a grandpa hyperactive... Great.. Just great...

I was losing it, I was definitely losing it.

"Rynah... The baraat has arrived," Prerna slightly nudged me, bring back to present, "huh?"

"They are calling for the bride downstairs," she explained while helping me up.

Anjali stood on my one side while Prerna on my other as they helped me carry the heavy [lengha](#). I could feel my heart beating rapidly, for a second I thought I was having palpitations but then I understood that it was nothing but the sound of my doom.

We slowly walked down the long corridor with me already lost in my depressing thoughts.

"Rynah! Watch it!" Anjali scolded me, stopping me from rolling down the stairs.

I blinked, coming back to the present, "oh..."

"Where are you lost?" Prerna asked worriedly. Making me just shake my head in reply.

As we climbed down the stairs, the recital of marriage mantras echoed through the hall, still the numbness prevented any kind of feeling from affecting me. The dread was yet to set. I was surprised, how come I didn't make a run for it already?

I was gently led to the [mandap](#) and seated beside the man to whom I was supposed to be married by the end of the day. The [sehra](#) made of white beads became an obstruction to my sight from seeing his face. Anyway, it didn't matter. It was better off that I couldn't see Surya's face, I might scream and run away from here if I did...

I zoned out of reality yet for another time. As long as the reality stayed away from me, I would not break down at the moment. I don't know how long I sat there like a zombie. It was until my dad touched my shoulder and nodded towards the jar containing clarified butter.

I picked the spoonful of clarified butter and felt another hand holding the back of my hand. I looked up enough to understand that it was the hand of my so-called-groom. I had frozen on the spot, if it wasn't for him, I would have sat that way for a whole hour. He gently pulled my hand towards the blazing fire as we poured the clarified butter into it. I spaced out again, trying to ignore the feel of his skin against mine.

I was once again lost in my own world until my mother tried to get me to stand. I didn't understand why at first but later realized that we were supposed to perform the seven circumambulations, one of the most important features of any Hindu wedding, involving seven rounds around sacred fire lit for the purpose amidst the Vedic mantras. The ritual where I would be bound to him in unbreakable vows, forever.

My dad tied the end of my veil with my groom's scarf. As I was about to start the [pheres](#), a hand slipped into mine catching me off-guard. My heart skipped a beat before going back numb. I didn't have to see who was holding my hand. The ritual needed the hands of the couple to be entwined. I started by walking around the fire, again none of my surroundings matter to me.

I continued and continued and continued until I was pulled back and made to sit back on the [mandap](#). I didn't even realize that we had changed positions and at one particular moment he was leading the trail while I followed.

I stared into the fire as the [mangalsutr](#) was tied around my neck. I felt my mangteeka being lifted as [sindhur](#) was dragged over my hair part line.

There it was, almost to the end, I was now a married woman just waiting for the leftover rituals to be completed. That thought made me completely blank.

For how long? I had no idea. I was finally married, I was married to Surya Kanth Nath...

The literal End of my life... Starting with an 'E'.

My mother helped me get up. Both of my parents were already in tears yet I could see the satisfaction on their faces as if they were happy that I was married now. We were sent to take blessings of the elders, and the first person I was pulled towards was a lady who looked around my father's age but she was still so beautiful and poised for her age.

For a second I just blinked at her, kind of mesmerized with her beauty.

She must be Surya's sister...

She smiled tenderly at me as she blessed us. We headed towards my parents who were weeping with a smile. After taking their blessings, the final ritual was performed, [bidai](#)...

The ritual, thinking about which my heart clenched. My path would now separate from that of my family, my parents and my sister... I would be a part of them yet still not a part of them because I had just become a part of another family...

I would no longer be waking up in my room, I would no longer be seeing my mother as the first person in the morning, I could no longer be acting immature in front of my sister when my father favors me over her...

My whole life was going to change. Even though I didn't ever want to leave my family, my house, I had to go where my husband goes. I burst out in sob and I hugged my father as everyone walked outside towards the awaiting car. He was vigorously shaking as he wept over my shoulder. I was missing him already.

My mother placed her hand over my shoulder ready to engulf me in a bear tight hug, which she did exactly once my dad released me. My mom and I sobbed uncontrollably like that. Before my sister gave us a group hug. My mother withdrew as she rested her head on my dad's shoulder and continued to cry. My sister Ritika, my aunt Lasika, Purna and Anjali all of them hugged me one after another.

It was surprising, but Luv and Kush didn't tease me. Instead, they hugged me and even shed some tears while they tried to hide it. Gently, I was being pulled back, I turned around to find my father who smiled through his tears as he slowly guided me towards the awaiting black Benz.

I got into the car as I continued to sob. I was such a mess that I didn't even register the door closing and the car moving. All I did was cry until I exhausted myself to sleep.

The clattering of bangles rang around as I rolled over. The soft mattress felt warm underneath me. I slowly opened my eyes letting the blurriness clear.

"That's pretty..." I mumbled looking at the beautiful interiors of the ceiling before the panic set in. My eyes widened as I sat up straight, "oh gosh! Oh gosh! This is not real! This should be just a dream! A nightmare!"

The door to the washroom opened and a man came in with a towel in his hand, he was in a [sherwani](#) and a frown marred his forehead. It was like he had rushed out of the washroom in a hurry and worried.

My heart dropped, "no, this can't be happening."

I kept shaking my head to myself while he just patiently watched me, "this is not true, I'm not here again!"

I might have been yelling but I didn't care. I looked at Viaan still not believing that he was right there, I still couldn't believe that I was back in this damned room, I still couldn't believe that this was the reality.

And that was when my dumb brain registered another thing, *he* was in *the [sherwani](#)*... the *same [sherwani](#)* that Surya was wearing for *our* marriage. And all of a sudden, everything clicked into place making color to drain from the face.

"I-I'm married to y-you?" I choked out in disbelief.

He just gave me a blunt look before deadpanning, "No Sherlock Holmes, you are married to Aristotle's daughter. And I'm just a delivery man."

20. BEES

My lower lip quivered as tears started to blur my eyes. I was married to this jerk!?! How? When? Why?

How in a sense, how was it possible?

When did it happen? And why wasn't I informed about this beforehand?

I heard Viaan exhale loudly, "look, I didn't mean it like that. I didn't say it intentionally, it was a reflex—" I cut him off whispering, "out."

No, I wasn't angry or hurt.

Viaan looked taken aback, "what?"

"I said 'out'," I repeated as calmly as the calm before a storm. My blood that was boiling like lava, dried all my tears. All of a sudden my depression had dissolved, leaving me very much exposed to the mixture of extreme emotions. And the dominant one was the incandescent.

"Excuse me?" He looked away giving an amused chuckle as if I was cracking a joke here. He turned to face me, the expression on his face looked like he was expecting me to add '*just kidding*' and run into his arms.

Then you thought wrong, Mr. Raivardhan.

Fuming with rage, I let my legs swallow the distance between us as I started pushing him towards the door, "you arrogant, sadistic jerk! Who do you think you are? Supreme justice?" I full on yelled in rage as I pushed him back and surprisingly, he didn't react. He looked like he was caught off-guard. I didn't stop there as I gave him another push, "That you keep judging me and giving your verdict for what should happen in my life?" I had managed to edge him near the door as I continued with my rant, "You were not happy with what you put me through, so you thought that '*let's give Rynah some more hard time, she hasn't got enough of it, yet*' and married me?"

I must say I failed terribly at mimicking his voice. That sexy, silky, deep voice that made me feel like...

Get your head out of the gutter woman! I did so not think that right now!

"Rynah," Viaan's voice pulled me out of my self-flagellation, he was about to say something when I pulled the door open, pushed him out before spitting venomously, "I thought I was marrying Surya. Had I known it was you, I would have happily jumped off from the tenth floor without a parachute."

With that, I slammed the door shut on his slightly widened eyes which he had it recomposed real soon, to my dismay. Anyway, the closed door must be enough of a shocker to him.

That's right, Mr. Viaan Raivardhan, not every girl is your fan, not everyone would swoon at your feet.

On the other hand, Viaan stood still by the door not knowing what to do for the first time. He surely hadn't expected me to kick him out of his own room on the very first night of our marriage.

"Well, she's a handful, isn't she?" Viaan turned to face a smirking Vikrant who was standing a few meters away from him, in his night suit. Vikrant closed the file he was holding and looked at his brother, giving a top to

bottom scan, "she didn't even let you change from your marriage attire."

"Tell me about it," Viaan exhaled an irritated sigh.

"This is going to be very interesting," Vikrant smirked again as he gave a finger salute and headed towards his room.

Viaan let out another frustrated sigh, trying to figure out how to handle the unexpected situation he was facing.

While Viaan was trying to figure out what to do, I tried calling my parents up from the mobile phone that I had brought with me. They should be able to explain this to me, they OUGHT TO!

'The number you are calling is currently switched off, please try again later. Thank you,' the computerized voice kept repeating the same message on both of my parents' number in three different languages.

I exhaled in annoyance. What were they even doing? Why did they turn their mobile phones off?

I tried Ritika's number and to hear the dialing tone, made me so happy. She picked it after the fourth dial, "hello?"

"Hello, Ritika?" I asked when I heard an unfamiliar female voice.

"No, actually this is Ritika's friend Sushma. May I know who is this?" Sushma asked.

"Hi, Sushma. This is Rynah, Ritika's sister can you pleas—" Sushma cut me out squealing, "Rynah Di? The Raivardhan-wale-Rynah di? The one who just got married to Viaan Raivardhan?"

I was dumbfounded upon hearing what she had just stated. Did everyone know that I was getting married to that *jerk* except for me?

"Y-yeah...?" My answer sounded more like a question but she didn't seem to care, "you are just so lucky! I wish I could be in your shoes, but I am not that old enough, yet. How is it over there, Di? It must be amazing, right? Of course, it will be amazing, how silly of me," Sushma giggled. I blink like Mayank's cat that sat on his neighbor's compound listening to her rant.

You are so lucky! Lucky my ass... I feel like murdering that asshole right now.

"Sushma, where is Ritika?" I asked when her giggles subsided.

"Oh! Ritika is fast asleep beside me. We were having a sleepover at your house. Your family has been a crying mess," Sushma replied making my heartache.

It must have been equally tough for them just as it was for me. I missed my family already, I wanted to go back home. I felt my eyes swelling up with tears again. Maybe, it wasn't a really good time to question my parents about this... Maybe, I should have called them tomorrow. Yeah, that would be better.

"Okay, Sushma. Thank you for letting me know that. Good night."

"Good night, Di!" She ended the call making me sag my shoulders. What was I supposed to do till then?

Sleep, obviously.

A sarcastic part of my mind remarked making me roll my eyes at no one in particular. Though I was still dressed in my wedding dress, I felt really lazy to change. So, I removed my jewelry and veil. Placing them on the nightstand beside me, I laid back watching the familiar ceiling.

I just can't believe that I was back here. And this time, I was stuck here...

Forever. Why? Because I was married to his highness of the kingdom of jerkenia and divorce was out of the question when my marriage occurred in questionable situations. Especially, when divorce was treated like sin and divorcees were treated like criminals in some of the Indian societies, *my* society...

I closed my eyes, exhausted with the day's events and let the darkness swallow me.

The next time I actually woke up, I realized I had already panicked. I was screaming and thrashing and flailing. But then, I had been pulled into a pair of strong arms. The continuous words of sweet comforts were whispered into my ear, "it's okay, there's nothing to worry. You are safe, here. I'll keep you safe..."

The arms restrained my movement as well as his hand gently stroked the back of my head. I automatically relaxed in his touch, the words calming me down and his cologne distracting me. My head rested over his chest, listening to his steady heartbeat.

"That's it, everything's okay. Hush, alright?" The voice finally registered to my mind making me lift my head a little to see the person holding me. I was shocked as I stared at his piercing pair of brown orbs. Immediately, I tried pushing him away. The keyword being '*tried*'. His arms tightened around me as he just stared. His head tilted in an angle like he was just scrutinizing me.

"Let go! Don't you dare touch me," I gritted through my teeth, yet he didn't.

I stopped struggling feeling futile. And suddenly he let go, withdrawing his hands as he stood up and walked towards the washroom. Did I mention that I fell back on the bed because of *his grace's* politeness?

"Ho-how did you get in?" I asked baffled still trying to get up. I chose to ignore his rudeness because I would be a widow on the very next day of my

marriage if I didn't.

Viaan turned to give me a bored smirk, "this is my room and I can get in and out as I please."

That arrogance made me roll my eyes. Was he seriously playing that card with me? I had expected more out of him.

I got up to stand, facing his back, "you are enjoying this, aren't you? You love to see me hyped up!"

He turned around to look at me incredulously, one of his eyebrows perfectly arched, "like I don't have any other work except riling you up."

And he started pulling his tank top over his head making my eyes widen, "wh-what are you doing?"

To say a squirrel would be jealous of my squeaking will do so much of justice to my reaction. I reflexively turned around and was now facing the glass wall while I felt my face heat up. My heart pounded so loudly in my chest that I could hear it in my ears.

Over the thumping of my heart, I heard moreover felt, the graceful steps he took to cross the distance between us.

Oh gosh... What was he going to do now?

Soon I felt his heat, only to see his naked torso pass by me towards the teapoy before me. He picked the fluffy white towel before giving a glance in my way. That was my cue to flush darker. I took another quick right about turn to face the opposite side of the room where he wasn't visible.

I jumped slightly as I felt warm air blow over the skin of my neck, the heat of his body warmed my stiff frozen back. His voice teased, "Just as my brothers

say, you are very entertaining. But... You are equally infuriating at the same time."

My mouth fell open as I gaped at his words. Anger took control of my brain as I turned around exclaiming, "excuse me?"

One tiny factor that I missed was the fact that I had forgotten he was shirtless, and that stupid jerk still hadn't had enough courtesy to wear one. I froze for the second time in a row as I stared wide-eyed.

"You're excused," he pushed past me, letting me fall back on the bed as he made his way back to the washroom. Another self-satisfied smirk covering his lips only tempting me to smack it out of his face. The washroom door shut close letting me realize for how long I had been staring at his back, supporting my upper body with my elbows.

I let out a frustrated scream as I fell back, not before thrashing around like a little toddler... I know, very mature of me.

It didn't take long for Viaan to come out. He was fully clothed to my relief. And as usual, he was looking as perfect as ever. Picking the watch perched on the top of the table, he just glanced at me once before picking his jacket and heading out.

I slowly got up and headed towards the washroom. As much as I wanted to, I couldn't run away from anything that was bound to happen. That could be facing a lion or even Viaan's family...

It wasn't a surprise to see the shower head already fixed, in fact, replaced with a new one. Bloody Raivardhans and their money...

I slid open the wardrobes in the walk-in closet, after I freshened up, only to encounter tons and tons of Viaan's clothes. All the shirts were either white, black or gray. Sorry, the shirts were all white, it was his t-shirts and tank tops

that were black and gray.

"I knew it! He was a white freak! Or maybe he's color blind..." I mused to myself thinking about the possibility of him not being able to see some shade of colors.

A chuckle reached my ears making me whip around to look at the lady who was standing by the door. She looked familiar before I realized that she was the same lady we had sought for blessings from my husband's side. The one who I had assumed to be Surya's sister...

"Oh..." I didn't even realize that I had let out that sound from my mouth.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to be impolite. I knocked at the door thrice but there was no reply," she explained looking around. She looked so calm and peaceful. Nothing about her felt malicious or snide.

"No, it's okay. Please, do come in," I tightened the bathrobe around me as I let her into the walk-in closet, allowing her to sit on the peach colored sofa near the central display table.

The beautiful lady, leaned in a little as she playfully remarked, "He is definitely not color blind, so you don't have to worry about explaining to him that red is not gray while he is brainwashing you with the opposite."

I liked her already, she was easygoing and approachable.

She winked making me flush. She just grinned at me before introducing herself, "sorry for the late introduction, by the way, I'm Asha Raivardhan. Mother of all the Raivardhans."

"M-mother?" My eyes widened. If they had widened a little more, my eyeballs would have fallen out of the sockets. I could have expected anything else other than the 'M' word! She didn't look like their mother! She looked

like their elder sister...

My thoughts might have been visible on my face as she let out a melodious laugh, "sometimes it's hard to believe, but yes, I am their mother. And now yours too."

Her tender smile made me smile back.

The little beeps from the iPad attached to a big circular white magnet grabbed our attention. It wasn't there the last time I was here, that was when Viaan had held me captive in this room...

He must have taken it off with him, to reduce my probability of escaping.

Asha picked it up as the message 'you have a visitor' displayed on the screen before the watchman's voice came out of the speaker, "madam, those people came to visit, should I let them in?"

The screen displayed the footage of my parents and Ritika standing by the gate, holding various covered plates and a few boxes.

Asha looked at them before telling the watchmen, "they are family, Prajwal. Never hold them out like that again."

Hearing her words, my heart swelled up with respect for her. She turned to look at me before smiling, "get ready, your parents must be impatient to see you again."

Patting my upper arm, she walked out of the room, letting me get dressed.

I slowly went down the stairs, anxious as well as excited to see my parents again. The maid had informed me that everyone was in the dining, and she was also kind enough to show me the direction because I didn't remember it

from the last time.

My family was being very chatty with my mother-in-law who was nodding at something that my mother was saying, with a soft smile on her face.

It felt nice to see my parents smile again, the happiness glistening in their eyes. My father was the first one to spot me, "Rynah!" He stood up with wide arms open.

"Daddy," I got down faster before enveloping my arms around him.

"Missed you so much," he whispered above my hair placing a feather-light kiss on my head.

"Me too," I smiled in his hold before withdrawing to hug my mother.

"My little princess, I didn't even know how quickly you grew up," my mom wiped the tear from the corner of her eyes. She withdrew to look at me, "and look at you now! You have got a husband!"

I didn't know whether to blush or scowl at her words... Blush because of the 'h' word and scowl because it was none other than Mr. Jerk...

I chose to remain neutral.

"Good morning," the greeting from a familiar voice made me turn to look at Aaryan who smirked at me before giving a *mister prim and proper* facade to the rest of the people. I just narrowed my eyes at him. Greetings were returned to him as general talk floated through the air.

My parents were invited to the brunch that we were having. I mindlessly spread Nutella over the toast as I listened to the boring talk.

"Where's Ritika?" I finally remembered that my sister had arrived along with my parents.

"Oh, she wanted to have a tour around the house, so I have sent her with a maid to look around," Asha replied with a smile before adding, "I would have sent her with this troublemaker, if he wasn't sprawled out on the bed, snoring."

"Mom, have you made it your mission to ruin my dignified image? I'm a rock star! Please have some mercy on me," Aaryan groaned making everyone laugh. I was happy to see my parents feeling comfortable around here. This wasn't that bad as long as I didn't come face to face with Viaan. But fate was not satisfied with my situation.

"Good morning." Think of the devil and devil appears. I rolled my eyes as Viaan walked in placing his jacket over the chair beside mine before taking his seat.

I wanted to scoot away from him, probably to the other end of the table but I refrained from doing so.

"You didn't tell her that she was getting married to me?" Viaan casually asked as he picked up a butter knife and started spreading cream cheese over the toast.

"No, we did. Sharad did it, right?" Mum turned to look at my dad who looked confused.

"I thought you told her," he frowned at her making her mirror it.

"I was busy with the preparation, I thought you did it," my mom spoke in an accusing tone.

"I was busy with the decorations and invitations..." My dad murmured as they both turned to look me. And to say I was scowling at both of them would be hilarious, all I was lacking was growling at them like a wolf. They thought the other informed me and let me mop around? No doubt, I turned up this

way...

Aaryan snickered openly and shamelessly, earning a glare from me. Viaan smirked while Asha cleared her throat trying to hide her laughter.

"Anyway, what's done is done, let's get on with life," my mom clapped her hands as she started getting out the trays upon trays filled with food.

My parents were ecstatic as they gave Viaan so much of importance. My mom took out all the yummy treats that she had prepared, just to let Viaan have a bite. Not at all allowing me to even touch the dish. My dad served him while not at all staying still or stopping his mouth from saying whatever he was saying.

For a second, it looked like they had completely forgotten about me...

As if sensing my mood souring, Viaan turned to give me a roguish smile making me want to stab him in his eye with the fork I was using for the fruit bowl. Not only did he get his way, now he even got my parents on his side?

I huffed as I looked away. At the moment, I was jealous, very jealous of him getting all my parents' attention. Aaryan muffled a laugh as Asha grinned toothily at the scene before her. I knew it already... It was going to be a long day, a *long* long day...

21. EKKIS

"Rynah [di](#)! The house has left me

speechless! It's marvelous!" Ritika ran into my room just to jump over the bed. Wait! I did so not think this as my room!!!

I just huffed in annoyance as I looked at my mom who was emptying the contents of the boxes. Honestly speaking, those boxes were my little salvation, they contained all my private stuff, the stuff I had been preserving for a long time.

It had my first ever novel, my slam books of years and years that went back to my elementary school, then there were the presents given to me. They were a couple of creative artwork that my friends worked on. They weren't much compared to any expensive gifts, but they were closer to my heart. And then there were friendship bands, charm bracelets, my lucky t-shirt that now fit me like a cropped top and my stuffed doll, Sweety. She was such a beautiful doll, okay if you excluded the fact that she had lost one eye, her hair was all tangled and her light cream color had turned into coffee brown by laying in the dust for so long. She was pretty good, and she was my first ever doll.

My mom looked at me staring at Sweety and placed her hands over her hips, "I seriously contemplated to throw that trash away, you know?"

"Mom! How could you? Don't you feel your heart melt at her sight?" I replied horrified as I picked Sweetie up and showed her pretty face to her.

"It actually gives me a fright," my mom countered.

"Hey! She is a pretty doll!" I exclaimed.

"More like your very own Annabelle doll," Ritika deadpanned as she continued to type something on her phone.

"Don't you dare say something about Sweetie!" I threatened my sister pointedly before turning back to my mother, "anyway, what was all that about during brunch?"

"What?" My mom asked in bewilderment.

"Why did you guys treat Viaan like he was a king or something? You totally ignored me!"

She looked at me pointedly, "of course we will treat him like that, he's your husband after all and you are really lucky that Viaan married you, saving you from being stuck with Mr. Surya Kanth Nath." She continued to unpack the boxes.

"Lucky my ass. He had to do it because it was all his fault after all," I grumbled to myself. Either my mom didn't hear what I grumbled or she just chose to ignore it, anyway she continued to work in silence, leaving my idle mind to wander. My thoughts reeled back to what Aaryan had said after the brunch.

Everyone had scattered around, my mother and Asha went about discussing the after-marriage rituals, my dad and Viaan headed towards the living room, Ritika had yet to return from the tour and I was left alone, if you excluded Aaryan who was giving me a Cheshire cat smile, in the dining

room. He looked like something was surely cooking up in that big head of his, another formula of his to entertain himself. With his hands placed under his chin and his fingers interlocked, he looked quite innocent but I knew him better, he was anything but that...

It was creepy, to be honest only by thinking about what might have been running in his mind. I could never understand his way of thinking, like ever!

And to say that he was my brother-in-law, kind of spooked me more.

Though I still don't get it why Viaan had married me...

God! Please have mercy on this sweet little girl of yours!

Living with these idiots, I would need a lot of patience, a hell lot of it!

"Why are you looking at me like that?" I couldn't control it anymore. The wicked smile on his face widened at my question.

"I always wondered what it would be like to have a crazy person like you in the family," he untwined his fingers and pointed them towards me, "and voila! I get a chance to experience it."

I shook my head in disbelief, "you are crazy! In fact, every single one of you is insane! All the Raivardhans!"

"And you fit into the category just perfectly, Crazyness," he laughed shamelessly completely enjoying himself.

"I do NOT!" I exclaimed loudly dragging all the attention to me, but then it didn't matter.

"I don't even know how or why am I even here!" I grumbled to myself but it looked like Aaryan had heard it because his smile only widened.

Smirking victoriously, Aaryan stood up to saunter towards me as he sang, "dear oh dear, do you need a mirror? You look like you're in denial. Dear oh dear, why are you here? Oh yeah, you are Viaan's new wife!"

"What do you mean by new!?!" I shouted horrified while Aaryan laughed. *New? Seriously, how many times had **he** been married before? I could feel the dread sweeping over me.*

Asha walked up to Aaryan from behind before smacking him on his head.

"Ouch! Mom! That hurt!" Aaryan rubbed the back of his head.

"That was supposed to when you play such stupid pranks," she deadpanned before turning to me as her eyes softened, "he's just a troublemaker, sweetie. Never believe in his words."

I could believe Asha over Aaryan anytime because I have had the first-hand experience with him pulling a prank like that before. But what bothered me to be exact, was the thought of Nishika. Aaryan's words only reminded me of her. It wasn't a secret how openly she had staked a claim over my husband.

I groaned as my mind registered my own words.

I meant over Viaan, who managed to gain the title of being my husband. There was unquestionably something going on between those two, it was highly unlikely for me to be the first woman in his life, apart from Asha, of course.

Anyway, why was I even thinking about that? And why in the hell was I feeling something nasty churn inside of me?

Come on, Rynah! Remember you hate him, he might have been my crush at one point of time but then the crush on him died a sudden death. And now, I only hated him!

Ritika turned the TV on, letting a news channel broadcast. A pretty reporter in a suit was reporting, "And now for the biggest breaking news of the month. Mr. Viaan Raivardhan announced his changed marital status right after his marriage that took place in secret, the previous evening. The wedding was small and included only close family and friends. He apologized for the shocking revelation and promised to make it up by holding the reception party for all those who missed the main event. Our channel had broadcasted his announcement live the previous night. Once again here it is what he had said."

The reporter disappeared and Viaan sitting behind a table and surrounded by a large number of microphones came into view. The flashes of camera occurred now and then. The way he was seated looked like he owned the world. His aviators, stylishly placed on the table before him. The smugness on his face was very much evident. That asshole's cockiness didn't even leave before the cameras.

"Good evening, everyone. Thank you for arriving on such short notice. I don't like beating around the bush, so let me get straight to the point.

"I got married today, my apologies if that shocked you. It happened very fast, so I hope you understand my situation. I would like to invite the media to our reception. And the ones who missed the main function should have received the invitation by now for the same. Again, I apologize for the last minute invite but I and my wife would appreciate you to be present at the venue, tomorrow night. Thanks for your time and cooperation. Just try not to freak out when you see her." He winked at the cameras with a smirk curling at the edge of his lips.

"What the!?!!" I exclaimed in shock before the anger seeped in. The video of Viaan wearing his aviators, with an air of defiance and ignoring to answer the rain of questions as he walked out, just pissed me off even more.

Ritika was rolling with laughter beside me and my mother coughed to hide

hers.

Not even Luv or Kush or even Aaryan for that matter had pissed me off this way! I marched out of the room, determined to let my *darling little* husband have a piece of my mind. It was just that he was neither *darling* nor *little*. He was huge, well built handsome and...

Urrgh!!! Stupid! Stupid Rynah! Get a grip on yourself!

The first person I found outside was a maid cleaning the vase and marched to halt before her, "where is *he*?" I demanded angrily. Her eyes widened dramatically as she pointed below saying, "L-Library." I don't know what gave her an idea about whom I was asking about but I didn't wait to find that out. It might have been the way I said *he* or the rage that was evident in my posture or even my face...

I asked my way to the library and found out that it was just one floor below. The part of the house that I saw on the way was just as lavish as the rest of it. I wanted to stop and admire, but I had to confront a *jerk*, the admiring could be done later on.

I was boiling with anger, ready to tear down the library door from its hinges if I could, not that I could. Not even in a million years. I stopped by the door with the idea of sorting sort my thoughts. I couldn't risk to enter a war unarmed, especially against Viaan Raivardhan.

But that was when I heard it, "—I love you but now I'm married to her, she is my wife now," Viaan's irritated voice flew to my ears making my heart clench and shatter. That was completely unexpected...

I didn't even know why I was feeling that way... I hated him right? Then why did it hurt to hear his confession?

A loud sob broke out, it was a sound of a girl crying, "I don't know anything,

Viaan! But if you are not mine, I won't hesitate to go to any extent, even kill myself if needed."

No further conversation was conducted as silence reigned inside, leaving shocks to overwhelm my body. My stomach sank, so did my heart.

The fast clicking of heels echoed through the air making me back away from my place and hide behind the nearest column. The door opened and a mess of a Nishika almost ran out. I just stared at her till her retrieving figure as it disappeared around the corner. I so badly wanted to cry but then I sorted to an alternative. I throttled my sadness and hurt, changing them into anger, fuelling my already existing one.

Marching into the library, I walked till I stood before Viaan who was looking through some file as if nothing had happened just a few minutes ago. He didn't even care to look up, his face had a scowl etched on his features.

When I didn't say anything and just glared at him, he finally let out an annoyed sigh before asking, "what do you want?"

Still, not looking up at me.

"How could you? How dare you?! Being born with a silver spoon in your mouth, you think that you can decide for everyone? You think you have enough caliber to take responsibility for all the things you do? You know what, Viaan Raivardhan?" I spat his name bitterly as I watched him still stared at the file before him rather than looking into my eyes before continuing, "you are nothing but an arrogant jerk who finds amusement in torturing others and deciding for others. A spoiled brat who grew up into a man, who has only seen rainbows and unicorns. You will never know how hard life is or what it takes to be a common man. The pride and arrogance that you show is nothing without your money."

My breathing was ragged after I was finished with the little speech that I felt

so proud of. Viaan raised his eyes to look at me sharply, making my heart suddenly skipped a beat. The scowl on his face deepened as he glared at me, while I glared back at him head-on. I was afraid of no one, I didn't give a shit about anybody. At that moment I lived to stand up against Viaan and I was going to do that no matter what. His glare burnt like fire, but I held my ground. Even if it burnt me alive, I wasn't backing out.

22. BAEES

We glared at each other without blinking, refusing to look away. Because if any of us did that now, it would mean that they had submitted and I wasn't submitting to him. Ever!

He deliberately closed the file before stating calmly, though his face was furious, "is it over? Have you finished with your tantrum? Then you may leave. I have much more important tasks than waste my time on the banter with an immature girl."

I let out a surprised humorless laugh, "immature? You label me as immature when you are the one throwing dialogues like an arrogant brat right before the entire world? And you call me immature?"

"Well, you never did behave like a grown-up woman, right from the very start."

"As if you observed me for an entire day! You just stayed there for what, two minutes? Max to max? And you deduce that I'm a silly ten-year-old," I pointed out boldly.

"Ten-year-olds can be smarter than you. Five years is your limit. Some people don't need to be observed for an entire day, wasting my precious time. Just two minutes are very much enough," he leaned forward stating as a

matter of fact, on my face. That only enraged me more. I was sure that my face must be burning red by now.

The opening of the door caught our attention. We turned to find Vikrant halt at the door with a book in his hands. He looked at us with raised eyebrows and a smirk as he said, "Oops, wrong time. Please, continue."

He turned around to leave but I stopped him immediately, "Vikrant, wait!"

Vikrant didn't just stop but froze in his place. He didn't even turn to look at us. So I sighed in irritation, "do you think I am immature?"

Vikrant neither turned nor answered. The sound of someone's laugh echoed in the corridor before Aaryan came into view. He hadn't seen us yet, so he stood by Vikrant, asking, "why are you making a face look like your back was pinched?"

As if surveying around, Aaryan's eyes traveled to meet ours before a frown graced his forehead, "brother, Craziiness... What's going on?"

"Aaryan and Vikrant, both of you come here," I ordered sternly making both of them gulp, or at least Aaryan did. They understood that there was no escaping from this situation. It might have been my glare or my scowl that had frightened them, or perhaps the tone.

"Did you ever think that she could turn out so scary?" Aaryan whispered to Vikrant as they both started walking towards me. Like I couldn't hear them.

"I should be asking you that," Vikrant whispered back as they both came to stand before me with a blank face. I chose to ignore their little talk because I needed them on my side. So, I couldn't go all Kill Bill on them for those comments, right?

"Do you both think that I'm a silly, irritating, narrow-minded, naive girl?"

Aaryan opened his mouth saying, "uh-" but then shut it close before biting his lower lip. Vikrant, on the other hand, was pursing his lips together as if trying not to laugh.

"Why aren't you answering?" I frowned feeling the frustration seep in.

"Because you will wreck the hell lose on them if they didn't agree, but they might not feel like lying," Viaan moved towards the table as he picked another file and started going through it as he said.

I had a gaping mouth, the nerves of this man! He was behaving as if nothing important was going on here! Like we weren't in the middle of an argument!

"It's definitely because of you! Since you are here, they feel like they're disrespecting you if they tell the truth and talk in my favor." I raised my chin defiantly challenging him to counter that, he had turned around to glare at me. He knew that I was right. In this case, I really was because never had any Raivardhan brother stood up against another. They always respected each other, especially Viaan. I still remember it from the time where Aaryan covered Viaan's arrogance as his trust issues. And so had the other brothers, when did the same.

"Like they are. They just don't want to break your girly little heart since mom had word with them about not being rude to you," Viaan stepped in covering the distance between us as he stated, rather proud of his words.

"You think you are so clever, right? Very clever to know everything that is going on in everyone's minds, like your brothers' at the moment. So, Mr. Viaan Raivardhan, if you are that clever then why in the hell did marry me after putting me through all that? Did you think I will forget everything and fall at the feet of *oh mighty* Viaan who everyone worshiped? Did you? Then you are rather very stupid, I must say," I took another step in, poking my forefinger into his chest as I provoked him. My glare matching his own.

I didn't give a damn about how close we stood or if others were watching us. Those questions I had asked, had been bothering me since the previous night. I didn't know if I was more annoyed about ending up being his wife or hearing his amazing way of interpreting me. Either way, I wasn't leaving him till he answered both of my questions.

He opened his mouth to say something nasty as he always did, a scowl resurfaced his features. He lifted his hand to his chest level before curling his fingers into a fist; clenching his jaws, he closed his mouth and dropped his hand back down. But not before intensifying his glare, warningly. Oh! I was so scared. Not!

"Wow! Just wow!" We turned to face Aaryan who looked amused with a toothy grin. Vikrant was smirking, in fact, he looked like he wanted to laugh but just settled with a smirk.

"What?" Viaan voiced the question on my mind. What was so amusing about this situation? Like seriously?

"You both are married," Aaryan stated in disbelief yet very much amused while shaking his head. I wanted to second that. See, even his own brother had doubts about it. But then, how did we ended up getting married, again? Oh yeah, because for some idiotic reason that Viaan had decided that us being husband and wife would be great! Yippee!

"And you fight like a married couple," Aaryan added with a wicked smile causing me to almost nod in agreement. The keyword being '*almost*'. When his words registered in our heads both mine and Viaan's scowl deepened at him.

"We do not!" Objected both Viaan and me in unison before throwing each other a glare.

"See, even your thoughts match," Aaryan was undoubtedly enjoying this. I

seriously wanted to dope slap him and deny his assumption but I didn't want to risk saying similar things in chorus with Viaan again.

Unfortunately, both of us ended up remaining quiet as we gave him our own versions of glower.

"Aaryan?" Vikrant called seriously. His hands folded across his chest.

"Yes, bro?"

"Shut up," Vikrant ordered. At least he had some sense and acted like an adult. Vikrant turned to me and said, "one thing I do is respect Viaan's decisions. If he has married you, it must be for a good reason. I have no objections to what my brother here did. I will stand by his side and support his decision till the end."

With that said, Vikrant dropped his hands and walked towards the door. Aaryan followed suit but not before winking in our way. He just needed an excuse to escape, which he got when Vikrant left me speechless.

"By the way, don't behave immaturely and get ready for the function in the evening. We are running short of time," Aaryan shouted stressing particularly over '*immaturely*' as he walked out of the door making me gasp. Oh, that brat! He did that on purpose! I was so tempted to chase him down and strangle him.

Maybe, I definitely have had if Viaan's laugh from beside hadn't interrupted my violent thoughts. I swear, since I have met these guys, I have turned into a more violent person than I had ever been!

"This is all your fault! You are a bad influence to them," I turned around to face Viaan as I shook my forefinger in his face. I know what I was blaming him wasn't justified but I just wanted to vent out all my pent up aggression over someone. And he was the best scapegoat at the moment.

"You have a problem if they tell the truth, you have a problem if they don't tell the truth. Tell me one thing, were you born out of problems? Is that why you always have a problem with everything? Whatever is your problem with life?" Viaan gave me his annoying smirk.

"You! You are my biggest problem! You hate me, you are always a jerk to me, and now I am married to *you*!" I made *you* sound like an insult before I continued, "Why? Why did you have to take so much trouble to personally torture me? You could have just let that bratty rock star to give me enough doses. But no! You had to take this to a whole new level! Making me end up being your wife! Why does it have to be you anyway!?! And now you even call me immature!" I shouted at his face, literally losing my mind. I was more pissed at being labeled as childish than being married to him. Or was it supposed to be the other way around?

Never mind... My brain was fuzzy with all the anger. My thinking capacity had been shut down, temporarily.

He stepped in with a serious face, "you ask me why I married you? Well then, let me tell you the reason. Since I was the reason for your engagement to break and I was the reason for your family to be shamed. When you could keep your mouth shut, not humiliating our names, it was my duty to reciprocate. I couldn't let my brothers be forced into a relationship they don't want to be in, I can't let them into something like that when it wasn't their fault. It was me who committed the mistake, you can consider it as my apology."

I just opened my mouth to say something, anything but closed it again because I had nothing to say! I was left very much speechless. My eyes, saucer wide, stared at him.

Apology? He married me as an apology? *MARRIAGE!*?! Couldn't he have asked sorry like a normal person and clear the rumors that had been created by the people? Did he really had to go and marry me, while leaving Nishika

and his love for her behind? For this reason? Like seriously?

"You! You...! Urghh! You idiot! Imbecile! Asshole!" He interjected warningly, "Rynah!" But I continued, "jerk! Barbaric caveman! Did you have to go and marry me! Like, *MARRY ME???* You could have done a huge favor by just apologizing in public and clearing the misunderstandings! You have had to marry me?"

Oh god! Where was I stuck? I wanted to scream the part where he said he loved Nishika but I didn't want to look like a busy body, eavesdropping onto his every conversation, so I kept that to myself, for now.

"That's the catch, I don't do apologies. So be happy with what you have right now. So many girls would kill to be in your shoes." And arrogantly he threw the file on the table before turning away to walk out on me.

Oh no, no no, Mister. Not so fast.

I wheezed to stand before him as I stopped him, "do you really think that I was going to forgive you after hearing all this? Oh, the great Viaan married me because he is sorry! So, let me accept his apology and be his puppet wife for the rest of the life?"

He folded his hands across his chest as he exhaled loudly, clearly irritated.

"I am not going to forgive you so easily, Mister. You want my forgiveness, you work for it. I don't do charity cases, especially in this department. YOU will have to earn it," I lifted my chin high.

"Done? Over? You are such a baby. Very irritating and immature," he took a side step to walk around me but I grabbed hold of his collar pulling him back to my face level.

"I don't know why you keep implying that. Tell me one good reason to

believe you. What I think is that you just don't want to admit defeat. So if you are really right, prove it to me," I challenged him tauntingly. It was late when I realized how close our faces had been. Our breaths mingled, my heartbeat accelerated. My eyes stared into his narrowed ones, which had just accepted a challenge.

He pulled his collar from my grip as he stood up straight, towering over me. He did intimidate me and it seemed like he knew what effect he had over me. Straightening his shirt, he took a step in my direction making me mirror it but only backwards just to maintain the same distance between us. My breathing already hitched.

"You have been nothing but an immature girl right from the start. Right from the first encounter," he moved in making me take a step back, my body started going weak and my heart thundering in my chest, "You looked like you ran away from an asylum only to break into a fashion designer's house," he closed three steps making me step back at the same rate. My heart went crazy inside me, "You demand attention like a five-year-old, you nag like a teenager, you have no control over your mouth or your temper. And your thoughts are like that of a crazy troubled teen. You have zilch for patience or tolerance department." he took another step but this time my back hit a bookshelf hard. Two huge books were knocked out and were about to fall over my head but he caught it.

He stared pointedly into my eyes as if making me note. He completed by saying, "You act first and then think. And you are so clumsy that you can accidentally burn down a whole country, alone."

Our faces were only inches apart, the mingling of our breaths made my breathing ragged. I couldn't help but stare into his eyes which were burning with fire. It didn't help at all. I felt my body heat up at the proximity, increasing my heartbeat even further, miraculously. I wanted to reach out and touch his face. Trace his lips with my fingertips. Feel the texture of his hair

on my skin.

But that would just be very awkward...

He withdrew to place the books back on the shelf before walking out of the room. I was flushing red because of the book incident that had just occurred. I couldn't object to him because I was too focused on calming my nerves down.

And... As embarrassing it was to accept, many of the points he made were on the point. But that didn't mean that I was immature, right? Right?

Gosh! It was always so difficult to win against him! He always had an upper hand, always knew what to say, always knew how to turn the tables around.

Urghh! I hate him! I so hate him!

"Now, if you've had enough of sulking, get ready. It's our reception tonight," I turned to look at Viaan paused at the door. His face looked satisfied with the outcome of our little argument. Even the traces of his signature smirk happened to be evident on his features.

"My Dear *Wife*," he added with a taunt as he walked out of the room leaving me to sulk more. I was going to kick his ass one day. One day, I promise.

23. TAEES

"It's the biggest wedding of the month! And we are bringing you every single detail of the event, live on our channel," the anchor chirped excitedly as she looked at her co-anchor. The headlines 'wedding of the month' popped up, enlarged and disappeared on the screen as the other anchor started talking, "our reporter, Vijay Prasad is at the venue who shall be sharing with us the details. Vijay, what's going on over there?"

All the national daily channels and regional news on the TV were covering the same story. My reception.

I smiled nervously at my makeup artist who smiled back before she worked on my lips. The hairstylist was busy with my hair. My eyes found the TV from the mirror, again.

The live telecast of a smart looking reporter dressed in a tuxedo and holding a mike appeared, who started talking, "yes Naveen, as you can see that the guests have started to arrive at Sanctuaire by ARIAV, one of the five-star

hotels owned by the Raivardhans. Many of the celebrities from the film industry can be expected because of their connections with the Raivardhans. The richest families and enigmas of the business world can be seen making a grand entrance. The guest list doesn't end there, the celebrity lawyers and busiest surgeons can be spotted out of their uniforms here, today. Some of the dignitaries from all over the world shall be making their appearance at the event, including the businessmen and women and even other international celebrities. Given that, they are in and around Asia at the moment. When almost everyone is basically here, how could we forget the famous politicians and other higher authority officials? The chief minister is said to be on his way to attend the occasion."

My nerves started to tingle. Just two months ago I was a normal girl from a middle-class family. A nobody. Spotting a side actor was a big deal for me. And today? Today, my reception was being attended by the VVIPs from all around the world after readjusting their busy schedules to squeeze this event in there! That was the first time I realized the power of the Raivardhans, the extent of their connections and their social circles. And I was married to one...

Was this a dream? Me, being Rynah Raivardhan was just an unattainable dream, right? And all of this? The Raivardhan mansion, Aaryan, Vikrant, Neel, Daksh, Asha and... Viaan? It must be a dream. And when I wake up, I would be pushed into the arms of Mr. Surya Kanth Nath.

Only that made sense... Nothing else...

Anyway, this beautiful dream made me feel things that I had never imagined I was capable of feeling. I was already a nervous wreck thinking about meeting all of the dignitaries. It was just a matter of time before I had to go upstairs, to the banquet hall. We arrived at the hotel around noon. The guys went their way after dropping me in a suite where I was supposed to get ready. Even Asha had her separate room to get dresses.

The suite was big and beautiful, just like the rooms back home. The crystal chandelier, the ivory furniture, the pastel pink walls, and the glass balcony were absolutely breathtaking.

The door opened revealing my stunning mother-in-law, clad in a golden saree that made her skin glow. I ended up staring at her in awe.

She walked in, her eyes moved from my head to the hem of my gown. Her lips curled into a sensual smile when her eyes met mine, "you were made to be a Raivardhan."

My eyes widened a bit at her comment as a blush crept on my cheeks. I smiled at her motherly tenderness that she always bestowed upon me. Her heart was as beautiful as her outer appearance.

"Thank you," I mumbled shyly before adding, "you look gorgeous as ever."

She smiled affectionately as she cupped the side of my face with her hand, in gratitude.

"Some of the closest friends of the Raivardhans have just arrived. We can see the Raichands getting out of their limo," the reporter's voice reached my ears making me turn to look at the video of Nishika along with an older man getting out of the car before the screen was switched back to the anchors.

"Gosh, she does know how to stun people with her style. That elegance with which she moves is out of this world!" The male anchor, Naveen whistled. A picture of Nishika in a black, long-sleeved, gold-laced mermaid gown, appeared in the background.

"If we didn't know any better, we would have concluded that she was the new female Raivardhan, with that class and appeal. If I'm not mistaken, wasn't Viaan Raivardhan and Nishika Raichand rumored to briefly be together?" The female anchor voiced looking at Naveen.

"Guess, those were rumors after all. After what Mr. Raivardhan stated about his bride, I am really curious to see *the* Mrs. Raivardhan. I seriously don't know what to expect," Naveen shook his head amused.

"That we will. But now is a time for a small break. Stay tuned, we will be right back with more juicy tit-bits," with that said, the screen changed to a commercial advertisement.

"Don't let it get to you," Asha's voice made me look at her. She pushed some curls of my hair behind my shoulder as she continued, "people always talk, no matter what. But it's up to you to let them get to you. Just know to trust yourself when you stand on the right side. No matter the strength of your opponent."

Her words inspired and strengthened me and made me wonder how someone so sweet like her was the mother of someone as stuck-up as Viaan...

"Mrs. Raivardhan," a lady holding a folder called out making us both turn to look at her.

She had glasses on, her hair neatly oiled and tucked into a braid. She was in a long-sleeved, conservative, black gown. She looked like she didn't pay much attention to her outlooks but her features were polished and sophisticated. If she tried to dress up a bit better, she could easily turn a lot of heads when she walked by.

"I'm Natasha Shenoy, I was supposed to meet Mr. Viaan. Since he is not available as of now, I was asked to talk to you," she added dragging me out of my thoughts. Asha nodded as she headed towards Natasha. Natasha turned to smile at me, "Congratulations to you on your wedding, Mrs. Viaan."

"Thank you," I smiled back politely before both Asha and Natasha disappeared behind the door.

They hadn't gone out for ten seconds and the girls in the room started giggling. I looked over my shoulder to find the source of their giggles was none other than Aaryan who had just got into the room and had already started flirting. He was dressed to kill. His black classic two-piece tuxedo with a bow tie, fit him perfectly. His hair tamed back a little. My eyes didn't miss the huge knife he was holding, widening at its sight.

"Aaryan, what the hell? What are you doing with a knife with you?" I blurted out blinking like a blinking doll. The only scenario that was going on in my head was the sharp blade sticking out of my stomach. I shivered at the thought, but Aaryan wasn't here to do stab me, right? Killing the bride on her reception? That would be a controversy for the Raivardhans. And Asha might kill him after that, right?

One of the girls was taking his pic with the knife as he replied to me, "you don't have to worry about this, Craziness, it's for my brother. By the way, you're looking good."

"What?" Now the image in my head changed from me to Viaan with the same knife sticking out of his torso. The girls left the room still giggling, leaving me alone with an insane Aaryan. It was just, he was blood-crazed now. It surprised me how the girls didn't take him seriously. Maybe, I was only one overthinking?

"Which brother?" I asked narrowing my eyes at him.

"Neel," he replied heading towards a small panel in the wall as he pushed it open to reveal a box behind it. He placed the knife inside before pushing the button beside it. The box descended down before completely disappearing behind the wall.

Okay genius, it was just a dumbwaiter.

"What is going on, Aaryan?" I asked standing beside him to see him texting

Neel.

To: Neel

Send a pic

- Aaryan

"Nothing that you should be worried about," Aaryan smiled as the message pinged dragging our attention back to the mobile. Neel had already reply. As soon as Aaryan opened it, a selfie of Neel popped up making him Aaryan curse out loud, "who the hell made him a lawyer?"

Neel looked fine, well more than fine in a cream suit and a black shirt. Debonair, in fact. His hair styled with that signature style of his. So, what was this bratty rock star annoyed about?

Aaryan swiftly dialed a number and Neel's name flashed on the screen before he placed the iPhone over his ear.

"Hello," Aaryan raise his eyebrow at no one in particular, "did you cheat to pass in the finals? Or did you send someone else to write your exams."

The cockiness of the rock star resonated in his voice. His usual sarcasm was had heavy taunts for his brother. Typical Aaryan. He, enjoying the moment switched the call to the loudspeaker, allowing me to hear Neel's response.

"What the fuck? What's wrong with you all of a sudden?" Neel's irritated voice came through.

"I know that you think you look ravishing in that suit with all the laundry hanging behind you, but dude, who the hell made you a lawyer?" Aaryan winked at me playfully.

"Don't tell me you are annoying me for a stupid selfie in the laundry room?" I

could imagine Neel's eyes narrowing.

"No Einstein, I ain't that jobless. I asked you for a pic of the object and you send me your own. Genius, I tell you," Aaryan had a smirk on his face.

"Then learn to ask properly! You idiot! What should I assume when you text '*send a pic*'?" Neel end the call leaving Aaryan snickering and me shaking my head, amused. Another ping from Aaryan's iPhone had us peering over the device. It was photo of what I understand to be of a manhole cover with a tile moved aside to access the opening.

"What is it?" I asked unable to find anything interesting about a drainage entry.

Aaryan zoomed the picture till the image focused on a thin, shiny metal string trapped between the gap of the manholes' outer rim and the concrete floor. I couldn't help but frown at the image before me. And then things started clicking into place. There was a manhole in the restricted area of this building? And something was stuck in the space between the gap?

"What is that?" I couldn't help but ask, slightly worried.

"That is what he is there to find out," Aaryan murmured before putting the phone back to sleep and looking at me with a brilliant smile, "but you don't have to worry about anything. You go ahead and remember your wedding night. And we will take care of everything else."

He patted my upper arms before moving towards the door. He paused by the door and added, "the party has started, I'll send someone to get you. Mentally prepare yourself to be officially be introduced as one of us. As a Raivardhan."

With another playful wink, he walked out of the room leaving me to gather my thoughts.

And just like that my nerves were back! Voila!

Geez, thanks so much Aaryan, for nothing...

True to Aaryan's words, a member of the hotel staff did come to get me. She explained me that she was going to guide me to Viaan's room from where we both were supposed to proceed towards the banquet hall, together.

We walked down the corridor, passing several doors before standing before stopping at one. She opened the door for me, letting me in. It was another suite with a white theme, the lights burnt bright like a studio. The white umbrellas with bright light blazing behind them, stood everywhere.

Cameras were chatting with each other and their assistants were bustling around the room. My eyes landed on the one creature that looked out of this world. The black tuxedo made it look like he was made for it. Or more like it was made for him. After witnessing all the events, maybe it was.

His hair waxed back giving him a sophisticated look. It should be illegal to look like that!

Even his bow tie was perfect. He turned to look at me, his eyes taking me in as if I belonged to him. Okay, if you counted the fact that I was his wife, then he was right to an extent. But since I wasn't an object, he was partially wrong.

"Mrs. Raivardhan, please get in. We are going to take a few shots of you and Mr. Raivardhan," one of the cameramen gestured me to move towards the white backdrop.

They asked me to pose in different angles, which I did. And all along, I felt like I had been stared at. Alright, alright! I acknowledge the fact that every pair of eyes were focused on me, but one particular pair seemed to burn into my skin.

I turned to face the culprit only to be stared down in the eye. Viaan neither turned nor shied his gaze away from mine. As a matter of fact, he shamelessly raked my form, not even hiding his smirk plastered on his lips.

The cameramen asked Viaan to join the photo shoot. Apparently, they had already taken his single pictures, they were only waiting for me to complete the shoot.

Placing one arm around my waist, he pulled me flush against him. My eyes widened, shocks tingled down my spine. I slightly trembled in his arms. His spicy cologne turned me on. He only regarded that with a raised eyebrow, as if asking, 'what?'

How badly I wanted to kick his shin and tell him that he wasn't anything special in that tuxedo. But that would be lying one big time. And the jerk wasn't even hideous to start with!

"Place your hand over his chest," the cameraman directed making my heart thump even more louder. Hesitantly, I placed my palm over his chest as I had been instructed. His heartbeat was normal, unlike mine, making me envy it.

I looked into his eyes while he was looking at the cameras. His eyes reflected various colors mesmerizing me. Suddenly, he turned to look into mine. I froze for a second before casting my eyes away, my cheeks tinted with the blush under my makeup.

Stupid! Stupid Rynah! Did you have to do that? Look at him and boost his already inflated ego?

It wasn't like I was in love with him. And with that attitude of his, I guess would never be!

We took several different photos in different angles. I didn't dare to look in his eyes after that, afraid that he would catch me staring again. But it didn't

stop me from stealing glances at him. There was a picture in which we were standing face to face, where he was staring at me and I was looking at his bow like it was more interesting than the man himself.

"Thank you," the cameramen said simultaneously before getting out of the room.

"Let's go, we are running late," Viaan's voice came out authoritatively, laced with the touch of silk. His hand went around my small of my back as if it was a usual thing for him.

I bit my tongue from saying something snarky as we walked out of the room. We didn't even have to wait for the elevator, the private elevator was kept open by the guards in suits. Gently pushing me into the elevator, Viaan stood beside me, still not removing his arm from around my back.

I secretly inhaled his rich spicy cologne, allowing myself to admire it. The elevator pinged, opening to the view that I could only imagine in my dreams...

The parlor was lit by the dimmed, color changing lights. Small lamp-shaped chandeliers hung from the ceiling. A table with many different perfume bottles was placed in the middle with two huge white candlesticks. Concierges stood in the neat uniforms, ushering the guests to the hall. All of them slightly bowed in greeting at our sight. Viaan nodded back once before walking towards the white corridor on our right, it led to another larger area.

The potted plants at regular intervals and white sofas added color to the exotic look. Small white stools and low benches were placed around the area just to add to the beauty.

We walked through the corridor, my eyes trained at the doors before me which opened to a humongous hall decorated jaw-dropping elements! A piece of soothing music played in the background.

The countless bunches of balloons look-a-likes hung from the ceiling in the center of the room. The dried orchids covered the rest of the ceiling. The color changing lights illuminated the entire place. The white traditional chandeliers with candle-style lights had been suspended from the ceiling. The white theme made the sofas look plush and comfortable. The stage was raised a few steps above the rest of the place. Over the white spotless marble-floored rostrum, rested a royal white chaise lounge. Huge gypsum plaster arcs were placed at the extreme ends of the hall. The rostrum had a forest picture as the background before which the roman pillar flower racks stood magnificently. And people had already occupied the tables.

I gawked in awe at the view before me. If it wasn't for Viaan gently pushing me forward, I might have remained plastered in my spot at the entrance. All of this was better than my dream wedding! The only catch was the guy beside me, the *jerk*. Else I would have been on cloud nine!

Vikrant walked towards us. His hair had been pulled back into a small bun. His black peacoat and black pants looked like a new style for weddings. He gave me a half lopsided smirk before training his eyes towards his brother, "let's talk for a moment?"

Viaan removed his arm from another me to walk aside with his brother. They both talked in hushed voices that nothing could be heard over the music. Viaan glanced at me briefly before giving a stern nod in his brother's direction. He said something before walking back to me.

"What is it?" I asked him out of curiosity.

"Nothing that we cannot handle," he replied nonchalantly before adding with his signature smirk, "now smile, my dear *wife*. We are at our reception after all."

24. CHAUBEES

"Congrats, Mister and Missus

Raivardhan," wished another business associate of Viaan's, handing over a bouquet of roses.

I cast a bright smile at him muttering a 'thank you' as Viaan continued to talk to him. I was already getting a hang of it, in fact, I felt like a pro at it. I sensed Prerna on my left bend towards me making me lean towards her automatically, "I can smell something burning, just waiting for her to visibly catch fire now."

"Who?" I mouthed while my eyes searched the crowd for any possible hint.

"The one who had concluded that she would be the one instead of you," Prerna's little riddle made my eyes automatically snap towards Nishika who was giving me a nasty stink eye. A scowl etched on her face openly.

I had shared everything with Prerna as soon as she came to greet me. She hadn't left my side ever since then. I wished that I had Anjali too by my side but though she had already arrived at the venue, she hadn't come to greet me yet while the rest of my family and her family did, including Luv and Kush had already visited the stage... I am grateful that Luv and Kush didn't raise any ruckus in my reception but Anjali not meeting me? That made me

worried. Mayank had been dragged away by Aaryan whose eyes were filled with mirth, that felt like a bad idea but I already had a matter at my hands. Anjali. I could care less about Aaryan and his antics at the moment.

Deliberately, I summoned an innocent smile in Nishika's direction hoping it would piss her off more than she already was. And it worked beautifully well, she looked like a famished person, with a hunger that could be only sated by my blood. Can anyone blame me?

Perna's laughter made me break our secret communication as I turned to look at her.

"You are too much," She shook her head. Guess, it wasn't that much of a secret after all.

"She had it coming her way," I simpered, glancing in Viaan's direction noting that he was still engrossed in their conversation.

Phew, as long as he didn't know about my little stunt, it was fine. Couldn't risk pissing him off by messing a bit with the love of his life now, can I?

I immediately felt my smile flatter at those thoughts. I had to force it back on. Viaan turn towards me saying, "I'll be back in a few." And he was off with the other two guys towards the backstage, leaving his bride alone on the rostrum.

"I loved that bluebird ballet and the stand-up comedy," Perna mused out of nowhere.

"Yeah," I nodded mindlessly as my eyes searched the crowd for my family members.

"And I'm in love with Charlie Puth! Gosh, I so badly wished that he could make it to your reception but he was on a tour..." Perna's chattering

automatically toned off from my head when a particular Batra caught my eye. Her face was dull, her shoulders slumped and her eyes swollen. She forced a smile and nodded at the person who walked past her with a greeting.

It was crystal clear, she wasn't okay. Not at all. I could hear Perna blabbering in the background, "I was this close to getting a concert ticket but then Mayank was na--"

Anjali glanced at me, her eyebrows knitted together as her nostrils flared a bit. Her nose was red even under her makeup. She turned and headed towards the corridor that led to the elevator.

"—I didn't talk to him the entire week! I would have continued to give him a cold shoulder—" I cut Perna's rambling off in the middle saying, "I'll be right back."

I didn't wait for Perna to reply as I followed Anjali towards the corridor. People tried to engage me into a conversation, many just complimented making me deliver a quick smile and a nod in acknowledgment. But I didn't stop, I followed after my cousin only to see the elevator doors close by the time I reached her. I felt the anxiety seep in.

What had happened to her that made my jolly cousin so upset within the span of a day?

Whatever it was, I was going to find out.

I looked around for the stairs. Without thinking twice, I started to climb down the stairs. Upon reaching the floor below, I noticed the lift had just descended another floor down, so did I.

When I landed on the last set of stairs to the floor below, the cracked open door opposite to me caught my attention. Behind the door, I could see Vikrant and Neel talking to each other. Neel raised his hand showing a tiny

shiny metallic string to Vikrant saying something I couldn't hear. I didn't need to see it twice to understand what it was. It was the same metallic item that was trapped outside the rim of the manhole in the restricted area. Neel had managed to pull it out.

Daksh walked to stand beside them, covering my view unintentionally. I shook my head focusing over my priority, Anjali. I looked up to find the elevator was already two floors below me.

Cursing at my short attention span, I ran down the stairs on my heels. God, I swear, if they weren't so pretty to see I would have murdered the person who created them! The hotel staff and other people who were in the way, looked weirdly at me. Some even had guts enough to shout, "have you gone crazy!?!"

Well, guess the joke was on them. If I had enough time, I would have gladly replied, *'I was born crazy.'*

I reached the floor where the elevator had opened and was already closing. Further down the hall, I saw the yellow gown of Anjali's flapping against the floor as she disappeared around the corner.

I ran after her, wanting to shout her name. In fact, I did shout her name but it fell on deaf ears. I turned around the same corner when I collided into a hard body. The soft fabrics of his suit brushed against my skin. His strong cologne shouted pure manliness. He was tall and well built. I withdrew mumbling a 'sorry' to resume my chase after Anjali but a light *tick* sound of something breaking, filled the air. My right wrist even felt a slight tug in the movement before it was free again.

I looked up just enough to see the beautiful brooch above his breast pocket had just lost one of its delicate chain-links by getting tangled into my bangles but he didn't seem to notice it as he rushed away towards the elevator. In a swift glance, I noticed one of his cufflinks looked similar to his brooch.

I frowned at the nagging feeling that wanted me to follow after the stranger or at least look his face. The only thing I could see from here was the poised structure that he used to rush to god knows where.

It was just a silly little feeling, right?

Shaking my head to clear all the thoughts, I turned around to chase after Anjali who I had lost sight of. Crossing door after door, cursing myself for easily getting distracted with small things, I came to a stop when the weeping sound could be heard from the behind the door.

"Anjali?" I called out cautiously as I entered the washroom only to find a mess of my cousin.

"Rynah?" She immediately tried to wipe her tears that had strained her face.

I covered the gap between us and pulled her into a hug, "what happened Anju? Why are you crying? Are you okay? Did something happen?" I was already showering her with questions.

"Rynah!" She hugged me back before crying her heart out.

"Hush... everything is going to be already, dear. Everything will be fine," I rubbed her back trying to calm her down. Her breathing turned ragged as she withdrew a bit and started talking, "we had a banter which soon turned into a heated argument. I was so pissed at him that I said I never wanted to see his face again. He didn't deserve someone like me. And he just left, Rynah! He didn't care to contact me again! He just left like that!" She cried again. My heart broke for her. I didn't need to ask her who this *he* was.

"What was the argument about?" I asked her causing a funny expression to cross her face, "it's about nothing."

She avoided looking into my eyes.

"It's not 'nothing', Anju. What was it about?" I asked looking at her as she looked away, completely avoiding my gaze. Immediately, understanding dawned over me.

"It was about me, wasn't it?" I asked her making her eyes widen as she whipped to face me. That only confirm it, "it was."

Placing my hands over her shoulders, I spoke, "you didn't have to hurt yourself, dear."

"How couldn't I? He was questioning *your* character! How could I be quiet? He was talking all the nonsense that Ravi had spoken!"

I sighed feeling ten years older all of a sudden, "everyone keeps talking about new gossip, Anjali. When it turns old, it dies. For something that was going to die, you simply hurt yourself. You should have let his doubt clarify by itself, he would have learned about the truth eventually."

She shook her head, "maybe I loved him. It did hurt when he left me just like that but I love you more and I shall not tolerate anyone speaking any rubbish about you. Let it be my friend or even my lover. I hate him, I so hate him for that!"

"Anju..." I had no words to tell. I just pulled her into another tight hug as my heart warmed and ached for her at the same time. The bond that we shared was irreplaceable and I was so glad that I had the honor to have a sister like her.

The ringing of my phone broke our trance. I could say that her mood had lightened up.

"New phone?" Anjali noted smiling a bit.

"Yeah, Asha had got one for me before arriving here," I smiled as I received

the call with the caller ID flashing as '*Jerk*'.

"Yes, how may I help you?" I asked professionally only to hear the annoyed voice of Viaan's from the other side, "where in the hell are you?"

"I am with Anjali. We'll be back in a few," I glanced at Anjali who was biting her lower lip worried.

"Come over to the room where we had the photo shoot. I made your parents believe that you are with me. Now don't make me wait, I am already losing my patience." With that, he ended the call leaving me to grumble, "jerk."

"Now who's this jerk?" Anjali asked with a furrowed brow.

"Who else? My one and only husband," I replied sourly.

I and Anjali enter the room to find all the Raivardhans except for Asha. Daksh was the first one visible, who was busy staring at his phone while leaning against the wall right opposite to the door. Vikrant was being pestered by Aaryan while Viaan stood with Neel discussing over something. All of them stopped what they were doing to look at us.

"Daksh," Viaan called nodding at his brother and making him approach Anjali, "let me take you to a room to freshen up."

His voice was calm and gentle as if he cared about her. The same tone that he used had with me. Anjali shot me a swift glance before walking away with Daksh.

I turned around to feel all their gaze focused on me.

"Where were you?" Viaan asked calmly but his eyes said he was anything but calm.

"A-Anjali wasn't feeling alright... I followed her downstairs to comfort her a little," I don't know why I stuttered while replying. Something about his stance and his tone put me on the edge. Viaan silently covered the distance between us. He looked like a predator ready to pounce on his prey if needed, "Don't ever go anywhere without informing me."

I opened my mouth to counter that but he raised his finger stopping me, "agreed I wasn't there but you shall call me up if needed. That's why you have a phone. I'm telling you this for your own safety, now that you are a Raivardhan and especially my wife, you are my responsibility."

He looked like a teacher scolding a little girl though he wasn't actually scolding. I bent my head a bit feeling intimidated as I looked at him from under my lashes. He wasn't looking at me but rather his gaze was focused on my lower arm, a frown etched on his face. His arm reached forward pulling out a delicate chain-link from my gold bangles just to narrow his eyes at it.

"Where had you been?" Viaan asked still looking at the tiny little silver chain.

"I told you, already. I went after Anjali—" he cut me off asking, "Which floor?"

"E-Eighteenth," I gulped as Viaan turned to look at Vikrant with a serious face who immediately opened the laptop on the table beside him and started typing something.

Viaan faced me once again, "try to remember with whom and where did you interact this evening who had something like this on them?"

He raised his hand showing the small chain. Now that I noticed the chain, it had a blackish hue to it. Small stones embedded on the sides of the chain at equal intervals.

Seriously, who would have patience to detail things this finely?

And immediately my brain clicked, "it was the guy on the eighteenth floor who I bumped into while running after Anjali. He might be one of the hotel clients. He looked like he was in a hurry."

"He's not a client," Viaan shook his head.

"How do you know? You weren't even there," I pointed out.

"The hotel is closed for the day. So there is no one from outside unless they were one of the guests invited by us. And none of the guests would be going downstairs because the hotel staff is strictly instructed to guide them back to the banquet hall," Viaan explained.

"Your staff isn't doing a really good job you know, they neither stopped me nor Anjali," I pointed out.

"They know my bride and her family. So it's out of the question," he retorted making me gape at his words.

"That means those idiots knew damn well who I was yet they had enough guts to shout asking if I had gone crazy!?!!" I whisper yelled in disbelief. I looked up to find amusement flash over Viaan's face as he stated with a chuckle, "Looks like they are very good at judging a person."

Urghh!!! This jerk! I so badly wanted to punch him!

I had my hand rolled into fists hoping that I get a chance to land my dream punch on that smug face of his. Instead, he turned around when Vikrant called, "Viaan."

The rest of the Raivardhans rushed towards him, including me. Vikrant had a recording covering his laptop screen. And as surprising as it sounded, I was there on the screen, looking disheveled.

Vikrant played the footage making me realize that it was none other than the hotel footage from about fifteen minutes ago! How in the hell did he get that so fast?

Letting my thoughts slide away for the moment, I looked at the screen seeing myself rushing down the corridor only to bump into another person around the corner. The person's back remained throughout the screen as I withdrew to step away from him and feeling dilemmatic stood there pondering whom to follow.

Stupid, stupid Rynah! You had your guts telling you to follow that person! Then why didn't you?

I would have, if it wasn't Anjali on the line... Yeah, Anjali was more important to me at the moment than that mysterious person.

"Check the other cameras where his face is visible," Neel ordered making Vikrant switch the footage off and select another camera before selecting the period. The video of the person walking down the corridor was visible. But what surprised me more was the fact that he had a white cloth tied above his face covering it. Except for his eyes, nothing else was visible.

He grabbed hold of the cloth's edge as he was about to turn around and within a span of a second, he removed it so skillfully that his face remained unseen as he turned to collide with me.

"Bastard," Aaryan grumbled under his breath, annoyed. Vikrant switched back to the previous footage to stop at the point he was looking directly at the camera before entering into a room, sometime after colliding into me. Vikrant zoomed his pic to find him winking at the camera. His light colored eyes showed victory, the white cloth back on his face covering his features.

"Dammit!" Neel slammed his fist over the table in frustration making me jump in my place. His eyes softened a bit making him apologize to me.

"What do you remember about him?" Viaan's voice demanded my attention. He needn't tell me who he was referring to. I thought hard about the suspicious stranger that I had run into, "I didn't get to see his face but he was clothed in a royal blue three-piece suit. He had this different, manly kind of cologne that anyone could easily distinguish. Like those," I clicked my fingers together to find the describing words that was at the tip of my tongue but not coming through.

"Signature perfumes?" Aaryan supplied.

"Yeah, signature perfumes," I nodded vigorously at him before continuing, "he was really tall and had a good physique. You can say ripped torso. He screamed hotness! I wouldn't doubt if all the girls fell at his feet for that personality. And his brooch and cufflinks were similar looking, with the chains like the one you picked. It was a intricately designed with a beautiful pattern."

"It sounds like she is describing her favorite crush. You don't satisfy her in the bedroom, brother?" Vikrant sat back smirking at me earning a scowl from me.

"If she gives this description to the CBI, the entire agency will die laughing," Viaan's lips had a slight upturn making me growl lowly. Neel coughed trying to cover his laughter as for Aaryan, he was sniggering openly.

"So you are telling that I describe funnily?" I asked them irritated.

"More of a useless way. What am I supposed to do? Take you to every *hot* male and let you sniff them like a dog? Not a chance. And as if that would even work with you involved," Viaan shook his head turning back to face the screen. Aaryan was doubling over laughter as Neel now chuckled openly. Vikrant had an amused smirk plastered on his lips while my scowl only intensified.

"Vikrant, trace down all his footage. Let's have a look at his activities," Viaan ordered completely ignoring me who was simmering beside him. I opened my mouth to bash him verbally but something else beat me to it. A beeping alarm on all the Raivardhans' smartwatches grabbed the attention. The red light blinked with a little fire symbol.

"The fire alarm on the sixteenth floor has been activated," Neel announced looking at his gear making dread sweep into my body. The sixteenth floor was on fire, on my reception night? My heart dropped.

What shocked me further was Viaan's words that left his mouth, "Vikrant, lock all the doors of the places where the fire alarm has gone off."

"What if there are people trapped inside those rooms with fire blazing?" I exclaimed in panic.

"Vikrant, lockdown the entire floor, leave no chances to escape," Viaan ignored my question giving another order.

We were doomed! Definitely doomed with Viaan around...

25. PACHCHEES

I just stared at him in shock. I couldn't believe what he ordered! He **MUST** be joking!

"You are kidding, right?" I asked incredulously. And when he didn't even care to acknowledge my question, my panic exploded in the form of rage, "Oh my gosh! You **ARE** serious! What are you? A sadist?"

While I was busy drowning in my panic, Viaan signaled Neel and Aaryan making them immediately rush out of the room. I turned to Vikrant who had a lazy smirk on as he continued to type like a pro typist on his laptop. Not even I could type that fast.

"Vikrant, don't you dare do what he says," my words made him stop for a moment as he looked at me amused making me continue, "Be a better judge of the situation and behave more humanly than your sadist, psychopath of a brother."

I could feel Viaan's eyes glare into the side of my face while Vikrant's eyebrows shot up, on hearing my words. Vikrant leaned away from the laptop making me breathe out in relief.

At least one out of these two was more sensible.

What I didn't notice was Vikrant's forefinger hovering over the enter key, which deliberately pressed the key slowly just for a show when I finally did

notice it, stopping my heart for the moment.

He gave me a sarcastic smile with an, "Oops!"

He reminded me so much of Mayank's annoying cat that used to do all the things it was told not to. I don't know where my anger was brewing, in my blood or literal hell. I had no idea but I so badly wanted to let it loose over this jerk brother of the jerk. Balling my hands into fists, I pounced forward wanting to beat Vikrant to death. But all my plans were sabotaged when a strong arm wound around me like a vice holding me back to a rock hard chest.

"Let go of me, I shall end this today! God help me! I swear I am going to murder all of these jerks tonight, and I know for a fact that it wouldn't even be counted as sin for killing devil reincarnates!" I was yelling at the top of my voice, wrestling against Viaan's hold.

And the result? Tell me, have I ever succeeded against this obnoxious beast? I think so not, except for the fact that he was not at all obnoxious to look at.

To hell with this man, his handsome face, sexy ass, and herculean strength! Really to hell! Or maybe this was the hell since he was the devil himself?

I stopped my attempts to get away and sulked folding my hands across my chest. For the first time, I heard Vikrant snigger. It was deep and rich just like him, it just annoyed me further.

Cat-ish Raivardhan...

These people were so heartless. How could anyone laugh like that when someone else may be breathing their last breaths?

I kind of felt disgusted.

Me mulling over my thoughts was interrupted when the door opened revealing three completely drenched hotel staff who were ushered in by the three Raivardhan brothers who didn't have a speck of a wet spot on their clothes. A few guards in black uniforms stayed outside while two of them entered after Daksh.

One of the guards locked the door behind him after everyone was inside. The three drenched staff members stood like culprits before us. Viaan let go of me before walking towards the male staff member on the extreme right and narrowed his eyes at him, "Where did you find him?"

"Caught him struggling to open the window at the end of the corridor," Aaryan replied as emotionlessly as a dead making a chill go down my spine. Though this wasn't the first time I had seen him hiding his emotions, then I had never seen him this cold.

Viaan moved to the next male, beside the former one, scrutinizing him under his cold glare while he asked, "And him?"

"In the room 604B," Daksh replied in a similar monotone. I could feel my eyes slightly widen at Daksh's poker face and stone-cold voice. I could expect other brothers to be detached and emotionless but Daksh? After he had been so kind and polite and caring towards me and even Anjali just some time ago? That was a real surprise on his part.

Viaan turned his gaze to the only lady staff who had started shivering out of the cold.

"Ladies washroom," Neel added briefly, not showcasing any emotion just like his brothers. His gentle side hidden underneath his cold facade. All of them looked so scary that way. If I hadn't witnessed their other side, I probably would have started crying by now for being married into their family. Agreed that Viaan didn't spare me off his cold side but all of them, like this? At the same time? Even Jason Voorhees might run away after looking at them.

"Vikrant," Viaan's voice was steady and authoritative as he kept his gaze focused on the three drenched people in the room.

"Alarms of 610B, 611B, and ladies' washroom had gone off, causing the fire sprinklers to go off," Vikrant had an arrogant glint in his eyes as he looked at the lady with a soul-chilling gaze. He looked like a grim reaper, especially with his light blue eyes, it could cause skeletons to jump to life just to run away from him.

When his words were registered, Viaan's gaze intensified on the only female apart from me in the room.

The other two were dismissed as Daksh signaled them to leave. Holding the woman still with his freezing glare, Viaan questioned, "Who paid you?" His voice just as freezing as his expression.

Though the question wasn't for me, I couldn't suppress the shudder that rolled down my spine. It reminded me of the time he had asked something similar to me, assuming that I had stolen some precious file of his.

The girl whimpered as tears threatened to roll down her cheeks. I felt pity for her, I could totally relate to her and understand her fear because I had been in her shoes not very long ago.

Taking a small step forward, I opened my mouth to stop this mental assault but someone else beat me by whispering under their breath, "Don't even think of doing that."

I turned left to find Vikrant standing not a foot away from me, his gaze fixed at the sight ahead of us as he continued to whisper only for my ear, "You will only complicate the procedure resulting in more severe consequences for her."

I frowned at his words as I turned to find Viaan looking at his watch, "I don't

have all night. If you don't speak now, I'll let the police do the job."

"N-No, sir!" Her eyes widened as she stuttered, "the o-order came from M-Mr. Raichand..."

I stood there shocked and confused by hearing her words. Looks like, *the Raivardhans strategy* of scaring people to obtain truth really did work...

"Raichand? Had a hunch about that," Neel licked his lower lip thoughtfully.

"Guards!" Viaan called still not looking away from the woman, "Take her away."

"Don't forget to collect your pink slip on your way out," Vikrant added arrogantly making her slump a bit before sobbing softly.

"Well, that was as expected," Aaryan remarked as soon as the guards led that woman out of the room.

"Mom must be worried, let's get back to the event," Viaan stated as he started to move towards the door while I stood rooted in my place confused over everything that happened in the duration of one evening.

"Craziness, you aren't coming?" Aaryan asked making me look up only to find all the Raivardhans stop to look at me.

"Wait, I don't think I understand anything at all here.. What just happened? Who was the guy that we saw on the CCTV footage? Did the woman really light a fire and yet the event is still going on even after all this happened? It must have been a chaos in the banquet hall due to this fire! I am just so confused right now that I my head is hurting..." I was a blabbering mess.

They sure were amused by my little blabbering show except for Viaan, who sighed slightly irritated but he eventually said, "Aaryan."

Aaryan smirked as he started explaining, "the hotel has fire sprinkler systems which activate only on those particular floors where the smoke is been detected and not the entire building. Vikrant had changed the fire alarm settings for today, so it would only let us know if there was a fire or 'fake' fire, as of today. This was only known by us, and no one else.

"The hotel also happens to have the lockdown system as you just noticed, allowing us to remotely lockdown the area we want. So, the sixteenth floor was under lockdown, and when we reached there, we shut the sprinklers and opened the locked doors one by one gathering all the people who were stuck inside. Which happened to be those three people, among them one was the culprit, the one who tried to trigger the alarm in attempt to sabotage the party. We found the culprit, who confessed to work for Raichand, fired her. So, nobody knows what happened other than us and hence the reception is still going on. End of the story, now shall we go?"

"But why would this Raichand guy want to ruin our reception?" I frowned.

"Because your husband married you and not his daughter," Daksh shrugged.

"We don't know about that," Viaan breathed making a part of my heart clench to see him defending Nishika's father even after hearing all this.

"Come on, bro! Everyone knows that Nishika is crazy about you," Aaryan snorted.

"That doesn't mean that he would risk losing our trust for such a petty thing," Viaan was clearly irritated.

Really Viaan? Nishika's love was petty to you now?

I so badly wanted to yell, *'I know your secret'* at his bloody handsome face but I restrained and resorted to asking the final question I had, "And that guy I bumped into earlier? Who was that?"

"We are trying to find all the information about him available to us. So you have no need to worry," Viaan replied, his eyes burned into mine and that was the cue for my heart to flutter.

"Of course, she isn't worried. She is rather missing that hot guy with signature cologne," Aaryan gave me that irritating smile of his making my eyes narrowed at him.

Before I could do something, Neel dope smacked him on my behalf making him cry out, "Ouch! That hurts!"

We were back in the banquet hall. Just like Aaryan had told, nobody had any clue about what all happened on the floors below them. Except for Nishika's father, who looked like he was constipated.

"Where were you? The guests were asking about you," My mom smiled and nodded at somebody as she scolded me from the corner of her mouth to remain inconspicuous.

"I was with Viaan, mom," I kept it short and honest. She nodded in understanding.

"Guess what? Tapasya and Rajeev are here," she added with a laugh, "They just found a few of the celebrities and are having a photo session with them."

I would have done the same if the celebrities hadn't done it themselves. Tom Cruise was here at my wedding! Tom freaking Cruise! He and some other celebrities were in Dubai for some event promotion. Not only him but Selena Gomez, Sandra Bullock, Will Smith, Mitchell Yo, Shahrukh Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Siddharth Malhotra, Bella Hadid and many others were here! I was hyperventilating when they came to congratulate us. I was grinning like a child in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, all the time.

The clearing of the throat brought me back to present. "You still have that goofy grin on your face," Viaan's smirk seeped through his voice making me roll my eyes. That was not enough to knock that smile off my face. I could see Luv and Kush surrounding Bella Hadid as they continued to bug her. My mom was beside my dad as they both were talking to my dad's boss.

Mayank and Perna were talking to Aaryan. Aadarsh uncle and Lasika aunty were accompanying Rajiv's parents. Anjali and Ritika were swooning over Siddharth Malhotra, along with so many other girls. The rest of my in-laws were entertaining other guests. It felt so good to be able to see their happiness glistening on their faces.

Two familiar faces appeared before me, before one of them engulfed me in a hug, "Hey! Congratulations on your big day!"

Tapasya withdrew to smile at me widely, "Can't believe my little cousin is married now! And that too to a *Raivardhan!*" The heights of her excitement were on some other level entirely.

"Tapasya," I blushed at her statement, "Thank you for coming."

"Wouldn't miss anything for this wedding," she winked before nudging her husband, "Right Rajiv?"

Rajiv stopped his small talks with Viaan just to agree with Tapasya, "Yeah yeah."

And the men resumed their talk again. I couldn't help but giggle at the cuteness of the couple before me.

"You are going to tell me every single detail," she left her sentence incomplete as she winked at me and started to get down the stage. Rajiv shook his hand with Viaan, congratulated me and followed his wife as another guest came over to congratulate us.

I woke up to the sound of Viaan's soothing words. He was rubbing my back trying to calm me down. My chest heaving vigorously with heavy breaths as if I had run a marathon. It was then I realized that I just had another one of my panic attacks. My hands fisted into his t-shirt in a tight grip. I felt calm and relaxed, feeling safe when he was around.

I was so tired that I fell asleep on his chest again. The next time I opened my eyes to Viaan gently peeling off his t-shirt from my hand. My back now rested on the bed and a quilt over my body.

I raised my gaze to find him stop his actions to watch me. He looked good in casuals, really good. Very different from his suits. He looked approachable. I don't know how long we stared at each other. His hypnotic pools of chocolate just made me want to drown in them. It felt like a dream, a sweet dream.

"Wake up, we have another party in the evening," his words made me blink once before he pulled his t-shirt out of my grip and headed towards the washroom. I blinked for a second time trying to comprehend what actually happened. I don't even remember when I fell asleep or how I reached the room. The last thing I remembered was having an amazing multi-cuisine dinner.

I looked down to find that I was in my night suit, letting my mind conjure a thousand thoughts in a second, "Viaan!" I shouted as blood pumped into my cheeks.

Oh, that sneaky jerk! I felt so violated!

I stood in a beautiful [ghagra](#) as the hairstylist finished with her last touches. I was supplied with brunch at bed as I had been woken up really late. In fact, I

hadn't even gotten out of the bedroom yet.

Viaan had left as soon as he came out of the washroom, without replying to any of my questions. I had planned to follow him out if Asha hadn't arrived with the maid and my brunch. She let me know that it was one of the maids who had changed my clothes, to my relief.

Apparently, today's party was exclusively for all the workers and employees who worked for the Raivardhans. Everyone from all the companies, hotels, studios and all the other businesses that Raivardhans owned had received an invitation. If they worked in another state, they could still come to attend this event.

"You look beautiful," the hairdresser complimented making me blush and mutter a 'thank you' to her.

"Is she ready?" Asha walked in wearing a classic off-white silk saree with a golden border. She had a set of diamond and emerald necklace and matching earrings on, looking elegant and beautiful.

"Yes, she is," the hairdresser replied, putting the bridal veil over my head.

"You look beautiful, mom," I smiled at her, making her caress my cheek, "So do you, darling."

"Let's get going, the boys are waiting," she smiled tenderly at me. I nodded as we walked out of the room. She helped me manage my heavy [ghagra](#). The stonework it had was just as beautiful as it was killing me with its weight. The men were waiting for us in the living room. All of them dressed in different party suits except for Neel, who was in a simple formal dress shirt with top two buttons undone and a dress pants. Yet all of them looked as elegant as ever.

My eyes zeroed on Viaan who was in a cream [sherwani](#) suit. Asha patted on

my back before moving towards the elevator while the four other Raivardhans followed her. I still couldn't look away from Viaan who emptied his drink from his glass, keeping his eyes on me the entire time.

Only the god knew at which hour I wished for him that it came true, because seriously man, he always looked so swoonworthy! The only catch, him being a complete J-E-R-K.

His eyes traced my body from top to bottom as he not so subtly checked me out, a lazy smirk tainted his lips. My cheeks burned hot. All of a sudden I felt self-conscious.

"Let's go," without saying another word, he got up and headed towards the elevator. I silently followed him not finding any words to say. I kind of felt disappointed since I had been expecting a compliment from his side after he openly checked me out like that. Anyway, when did he ever have a gentle bone in him?

"Today morning", my subconscious pointed.

Mentally rolling my eyes, I hushed that annoying inner voice.

When we reached the ground floor, a black Benz stood purring softly awaiting us. Others had left, leaving only both of us to share the last car.

Not wasting another moment, we climbed in letting the chauffeur drive us to the destination. The ride was silent yet comfortable. I kept stealing glances at my handsome husband who busied himself working over his laptop.

"Do you need a camera?" He asked catching me off guard.

"What?"

"Photos last longer you know?" He smirked. How did he do that? I mean he

did not even look up yet knew that I was watching him? And even now, he hadn't turned towards me even once! I wanted to ask but that would only confirm his words. So, I snorted in reply before retorting, "I don't think so, when I have the real one, why do I need a photo?"

My eyes widened when brain registered what I tried to smart mouth him with but instead ended up looking like a desperate flirt! Biting my lower lip I squeezed my eyes shut.

Stupid! Stupid Rynah! You and your big mouth! Was that really necessary?

I opened only one of my eyes to take a peek, hoping that he hadn't heard my earlier attempt for a retort. But when was I ever right when it comes to Viaan Raivardhan?

He directly stared at me with that cocky smirk of him, "You know, your mouth would be the death of you one day."

Well, it already was... today... right now...

26. CHABBEES

The awkwardness in the car forced me to rotate my neck at an angle of 90 degrees left and I stare out of the window. I swear hours had gone by but on consulting my watch it had hardly been five minutes.

I hadn't turned to face Viaan after my miserably failed attempt for a savage reply and him so nicely taunting me. Thankfully, he didn't continue to tease me any further and resumed working on his laptop.

The color of the sky was changing to a dull blue, similar to that of my faded jeans back home. My mind busy processing many things at once. What kind of relationship did I and Viaan develop? We couldn't stand each other's guts, always wanting to shove dirt at each other, I felt like strangling him every now and then yet couldn't stop myself from feeling this strange way towards him. Like he was the shade I rested under, after a long walk on the sunny path. The warmth in the snow. The anchor to my nomadic ship. Yet, I still wanted to choke him to death.

I know, not very normal, he made me abnormal. *Just like him.*

As if been called, the door on my side opened and Viaan stood there offering his hand to help me. I couldn't help but stare at it.

Was this ever going to change? Was it ever going to be like any other normal relationship? And most of all, did I want it to change? This attraction I felt towards him, would I ever let it overshadow the hate I harbored for him?

Does he even feel anything remotely like attraction towards me? Because he always proved that he had never been dazed by my presence.

"You know, you can figure out the math problem that can save humanity even inside the venue, right?" Viaan's voice snapped me out of my thoughts and on their own accord, my eyes widened.

What the hell!?! He was real and not some fantasy of mine?

I looked over my shoulder to confirm if Viaan was still sitting beside me, only to find he wasn't there anymore. Even the car had stopped moving.

And I had spaced out before him...

I squeezed my eyes close, quite embarrassed with what was happening with me today and turned to face him again. Giving him a forced smile while dying out of embarrassment inside, I put my hand into his and climbed out of the car as elegantly as I could manage.

And what ticked me off was that arrogantly amused smirk of his, plastered all over his face. I so badly wanted to kick his shin but had to push that urge down when the media started snapping our pictures.

Can't believe it, Mr. Viaan Raivardhan got saved by the media!

I faked a smile for the cameras because I couldn't be seen giving *my dear* husband a stink eye. Walking in, Viaan led me to the elevator where the security guards guarded it. They bowed at our sight before letting us into the elevator.

It hardly took two minutes to reach the floor we were supposed to get off. The doors slid open with a low ding and the guards stepped out first. I was about to follow but a hand caught my wrist and pulled me back. I turned to frown at Viaan who stared ahead yet didn't let go of my hand. I followed his sight only to find nothing out of place. The elevator doors shut close and this time Viaan tugged at my hand gently to grab my attention.

"Don't go wandering around anywhere all alone like the last time. Either you have one of us accompany you or inform us to arrange guards for you," Viaan ordered authoritatively still staring ahead of him but blinked once before making eye contact with me. My heart skipped a beat at his words and my throat went all dry.

Was that his way to show his concern for me? What kind of man was he, really? He loved someone else yet here he was to correct his wrong. I got on his nerves, argued with him, be rude to him by commenting crudely and challenge his every decision yet he treated my parents with respect, tolerated my outbursts, calmed me down during my morning panic attacks and worried about me. Seriously now, what kind of man were you, Viaan? You truly have sparked my curiosity.

I realized that he was still waiting for my reply so I nodded my head not trusting my voice. He just stared at me for a few more seconds before pressing another button to open the doors again and walked out of the elevator without another word.

The banquet hall was beautiful and grand with exotic decorations. The pink and blue lighting theme made the place look even more otherworldly. There were different seating arrangements in different lights for those who preferred a specific brightness.

The rostrum stood under a circular dome that had a chandelier decorated with flowers. The thread-like elements hung in a circle around the chandelier.

People started approaching and congratulating us for our wedding as we walked towards the stage. I was glad that they hadn't surrounded us like fans from all the sides. Guess, the corporate world does teaches people to behave like mature adults.

Thanking people for their wishes and compliments while accepting their gifts and bouquets which I would hand over to the helper behind me to take care of it, I scanned the area for any familiar faces. I could see Asha talking to a air of couples who looked like they had aged graciously over time. The expensive clothing and accessories screamed '*rich folks!*'. They might be business partners of Raivardhans, of *ours*.

"Oh my god! You truly look like a Raivardhan now, Rynah! Sorry, Mrs. Raivardhan!" I faced the owner of the voice to see that it was Kavya. She was in a maroon sari with a black backless blouse. Her hair put into a side plait.

"Hey Kavya! You look beautiful!" I smiled at her.

"Not more than you," she gave me a lopsided smile earning a giggle from me. I looked over her shoulder to see Jaspreet greedily taking in Vikrant's form who was talking over his phone. Not very far away from him stood Aaryan, surrounded by a group of girls. As usual Mr. Rock star was busy entertaining his harem.

"You know, it was a pleasurable shock to see you as the female Raivardhan? Though I had my bets over you and Mr. Aaryan, it's not at all surprising to see you end up with Mr. Viaan," Kavya continued grabbing my attention once again but now she wasn't standing there alone. Shreya and Prem had joined her.

They had congratulated Viaan quickly and formally before skipping over my side for a little chit chat. Or should I say gossip?

"Yeah, you didn't tell us how it even happened?" Shreya asked curiously,

slight envy visible in her eyes.

"When you send your parents with a proposal for Odin but they end up proposing Thanos instead, that's when it happens."

She just blinked at me trying to understand. It was crystal clear, she wasn't a Marvel fan, so I sighed and simplified my words to her level, "Let me reframe, it happens when you ask your parents to propose Thakur but instead they end up bringing Gabbar for their son-in-law."

All the three of them looked at me dumbstruck, not knowing the little circus, no, actually a big circus that had transpired behind the scenes.

The sudden sound of someone's laughter and a pat on my back made me jump in my place, I turned to face Viaan, "She's such a jokester, I tell you."

Oh, he even knew how to laugh? Even if it was just for show.

Understanding dawned on their faces as the three of them started laughing. Viaan smiled charmingly towards me but his eyes held a silent warning making me let out a dry chuckle, "Yeah."

As if his warning scared me. Well, not anymore, at least not after what he had put me through. He gave me a gentle squeeze as his gaze intensified, sort of saying, more like ordering, '*don't say anything stupid.*'

He let go of me and started or perhaps resumed the discussion with his business associates after I huffed out in defeat and turned back to my friends.

"So, Boss Raivardhan, huh?" Prem wriggled his eyebrows at me causing an irresistible urge to grab him in a headlock and drill his head with my fist. But then, I had to suppress my urge.

"Yeah, he looks so friendly with you, I had never seen him even smile at the

office! All he ever did was give that poker face, scaring the hell out of us!" Kavya ranted, making me burst out laughing.

Did she just use 'friendly' and 'Viaan' in the same sentence? It looks like she did. Oh, poor soul, she had no idea.

They looked at me like I had grown another head not understanding why I was laughing like a mad lady. None of them even asked why I was laughing, thank goodness. I wouldn't be able to explain them before rolling over the floor laughing. At one point in time almost everyone was looking at me, even Viaan himself but then they ignored it and resumed what they were doing.

"I thought that elevator lady who had been so dramatic and fake, was his girlfriend," Shreya commented thoughtfully. All was back to normal like I hadn't had a good five minutes laugh.

"Oh, come on! Don't pretend like you don't know her name," Kavya retorted before turning towards me as she chirped excitedly, "By the way, our Rynah beat her in all aspects." Kavya winked at me.

"In a sense?" I furrowed my eyebrows at Shreya's question.

I too had developed an interest in understanding the logic behind Kavya's statement.

Puffing her chest proudly, Kavya took out her mobile and played a clip. The same anchors who had been on the television screen singing praises about Nishika's appearance were now talking with my and Viaan's picture in the background.

"Oh. My. Gosh! Now I know not to question the Raivardhans taste in selecting anything. Let it be the perfect grand reception or the drop-dead gorgeous wife," the male anchor exhaled loudly in surprise.

"No doubt there, Naveen. The new female Raivardhan, Rynah Raivardhan beat Nishika Raichand by a huge margin. Let it be her exotic looks or her hourglass physique, not to forget the Raivardhan standards of dressing style. She was born to be a Raivardhan," the female anchor chirped excitedly.

Kavya switched the video off beaming widely. I didn't know why but I was floating on cloud nine. Maybe because I was declared to be better than Nishika in expectations? Or the fact that Viaan liked Nishika but I beat her? Or because of the phrase that I was born to be a Raivardhan? Maybe a bit of everything. I was no angel and no one asked me to be one. Especially towards Nishika.

"Rynah," the calling of my name made me suppress my euphoria yet I couldn't suppress my smile. I looked up to find Viaan gesturing towards an aged man who was standing before him with a smile.

"Meet Mr. Gajendra Tekur, the first man who signed a contract with me when I had just started," Viaan explained as he introduced, "And this is my wife Rynah."

"Pleasure to meet you Mr. Tekur," I shook his hand.

"You always go for the perfect ones, don't you, Raivardhan?" Mr. Tekur chuckled lightly before releasing my hand.

"You can say that," Viaan smirked before gesturing towards the tables, "Please do have dinner with us."

"No no, thank you so much. I'm on a diet so I shall be taking your leave early tonight. My wife has put me on a curfew, and I wouldn't want to upset her," he chuckled some more.

"Then I won't be stopping you tonight," Viaan smiled, like actually smiled! Like a genuine one! No pun intended.

I was still digesting the fact that Viaan could smile a real smile without any sarcasm or smirks when Mr. Tekur started to walk away.

"Let's have our dinner," Viaan didn't wait for my reply. Grabbing my hand, he dragged me towards the table.

I finished with the appetizers and started thinking about what to try first.

"Try Paella, it's good," Daksh suggested, pointing at a colorful seafood rice dish.

"Or she can try the risotto," Neel passed the cheesy looking rice item.

"Hah! You guys don't know but she will love mujadara," Aaryan laughed before preparing to put that dish over my plate but was stopped by Viaan who picked the Hyderabad Biryani and started filling my plate with it. The three brothers looked at their elder brother speechlessly who pointed at the food and just ordered one word, "Eat."

The three brothers sat back looking amused when I silently huffed and started to eat. This taskmaster was even bossing me around food now!

Only Vikrant had the guts to snigger, earning a stink eye from me.

The only reason I didn't argue back with Viaan was that Biryani was simply yum, and... I loved Biryani.

My parents joined us later when we were having our desserts. They had been busy with the guests earlier though they had dropped by my side for some time. Ritika disappeared after hugging me as a greeting and I hadn't seen her after that. Aunt Lasika and uncle Aadarsh were chatting with Mrs. D'Souza and Anjali was talking to her friend from school days with whom she had lost

contact. As for Luv and Kush, they hadn't strayed away from my aunt's sides. I wonder what she had told them before coming here. Tapasya and Rajeev had disappeared shortly after meeting me. My side of the family had arrived much later than us due to heavy traffic. It was no big issue as long as I got to see them.

On the other hand, Anand had surprisingly tried to muster a smile while congratulating us. The keyword being *'tried'* as it ended up looking like he was constipated. And Jaspreet, she was a lost case... Now that I've become a Raivardhan, she portrayed herself to be my BFF till Viaan, not so kindly, asked her to leave the stage in a gentle tone.

It was hilarious to see her face at that moment but I refrained from laughing out loud.

"I need to use the washroom," I excused myself and headed towards the private room for the bride and groom without waiting for anyone's permission.

The room was vacant and clean, unlike some other banquet halls that I have been to. Happy to be away from the envious eyes, I entered the washroom and finished with my work. It was all fine until I heard an unfamiliar voice from outside, "Yeah, I'm alone here. Don't worry nobody will hear me."

I stopped washing my hands and tiptoed to the door to hear what he was speaking about. It certainly didn't sound harmless and my guts were screaming that something was horribly wrong.

"Your plan is working fabulously well, she was caught yesterday after triggering the fire alarm and said what we expected her to say. The Raichands became the suspects as you had predicted, Mr. Rathore."

I accidentally gasped out loud due to shock but immediately covered it with my hands. The Raichands weren't the ones behind the fire alarm incident but

this Rathore guy?

There was a pause making me afraid that he had heard me but then the talk resumed, "Now, the Raivardhans will bring them down to the dust if we play our last card right. Just that tiny push will finish the Raichands' world. I've loosened the screws of the chandelier. Anytime now it will do the trick and Raichands will be blamed once again."

My heart stopped at his words. Loosen the screws of the chandelier? Which one though? There were so many! I have to reach Viaan quickly. He had been right about the Raichands while the rest of us questioned his reasoning.

I listened in for more talk, "I'll head out now. My Kamini is waiting for me at Cradisson and I'm not going to keep her waiting."

The sound of footsteps echoed through the room making me swiftly open the door in the hopes of seeing what the person who was speaking, looked like. But he had already left.

I ran out of the room with the heavy [ghagra](#) but there was no one in the line of sight! His words rang in my head like a danger siren. I had to stop this before anyone could get hurt. For that, I had to get to Viaan as soon as possible.

So, I ran towards the banquet hall as I had never run before.

27. SATAIS PART I

Rushing through the open door, I

grabbed some attention from the few tables around, nevertheless, they returned to their private chats, letting me take deep breaths and compose myself. Immediately, my eyes started to scan for the one face I needed to find as soon as possible. And there he sat, like the handsome devil he was, right where I had left him.

I walked as fast as I could, mustering a smile at the people who tried to engage me in small talks. I exactly knew how uptight and rude I looked at the moment but then again I was doing it for their safety. To make sure that no one would be hurt when they left the party, that was my goal tonight.

As soon as I reached Viaan, I bent over to whisper in his ear, "We have a situation."

I don't know for sure if there was a secret *Raivardhan-serious-mode* button with Viaan or something because immediately as if sensing the matter at hand, the table fell silent when Viaan turned to look me in the eye and stated just one word, "Elaborate."

And I did, quickly narrating the entire situation while he heard it all, very calmly might I add, as he usually did. And so did the other Raivardhans. My voice had been soft enough to make sure that none of the guests overheard what I was saying. My heartbeat pounded in my ears as fear overtook me. I didn't want anyone to get hurt, at least not because some imbecile wanted to frame someone else just to ruin him.

Aaryan gently squeezed my upper arm grabbing my attention, "We'll take care of it, don't worry."

I just merely nodded at his reassuring words.

"Vikrant and Neel, head over to Cradisson and catch that bastard. I'll send you the necessary information as soon as possible," Viaan was already all work, making Vikrant and Neel immediately get up and head towards the fire exit. He turned to Daksh, "I will be needing you here in case we wouldn't be able to prevent the accident." Daksh replied with a curt nod.

"And you," finally Viaan turned to look at Aaryan before he continued, "You do what you're good at. Distract them out of here."

Aaryan grumbled something about not being able to finish his new song and singing someone else's song before he left the table. Viaan too got up, making me question him, "Where are you going?"

His composed expression was directed towards me but his eyes held intensity like he was ready to deal with the devil if needed.

"Stay with the crowd, we will take care of the things," his voice was authoritative as if he was commanding me. With that said, he turned around to leave but before he could, I grabbed onto his sleeve to halt him.

"I'm coming with you," I announced with determination. My tone didn't encourage any argument or I hoped it didn't. But Viaan being Viaan, I had unknowingly accepted the discountenance that was coming my way. A girl could always hope, right?

He stared into my eyes for a whole minute, searching for something that I didn't quite understand. At last, he said, "Okay."

I stood there shocked and frozen trying to digest that Viaan had just said 'okay'. Okay!

He bloody said okay!

For someone who loves to dictate and decide for others without asking them, he agreed to *obey* for once!

"Wow, that's very nice for a change," I couldn't help but smile widely, feeling the giddiness with joy as I blinked, feeling fluttered. He just sighed loudly, actually kind of irritated with my response and turned around to walk away while I followed suit.

Before we could move more than a few feet, the lights dimmed and the spotlight focused on Aaryan standing in the center of the crowd. He looked up at the crowd, like the charming performer he was and spoke, "[Iss khushi ke mahol mein, ek gaana toh banta hai.](#)"

The crowd went wild with cheers on hearing Aaryan's words. He adorned a lopsided smile at us before he added with a wink, "This is on your behalf, brother."

The music started in the background as the backing vocalists started singing, entralling the crowd.

Sha la la la

Sha la la la

The lighting changed again as dim lights illuminated enough to see the obstacles while the spotlight never left Aaryan. And he started singing, causing my mouth to drop open. Nope, it wasn't because I was surprised by his voice. I had heard him sing before, so it wasn't a big deal. What surprised me more was the song that he had chosen, the lyrics that he sang.

He chose 'She's crazy but she's mine' to sing now?

Viaan let out a chortle earning a glare from me. What was that big-headed, annoyingly spoiled rock star thinking?

Nothing! He wasn't thinking to begin with!

"Alex Vorobyov's song suits you well," Viaan smirked without even turning to look at me. I chose not to reward him with any reply because I didn't know if I was red with embarrassment or due to fury. Either way, my face was burning.

Everyone seemed to be mesmerized by Aaryan's voice and started following him out of the hall, towards the open terrace that had access from the reception hall. It was like watching Pied Piper leading all the children away. For one moment I was tempted to join them, just to see what else was going to happen, but that was just for a moment.

"Let's go," Viaan's cold tone was enough to wake me up from the trance.

Mumbling 'yeah', I followed him out of the banquet hall and down the stairs. Yet, I could still hear Aaryan singing, loud and clear.

Viaan stopped to meet the security head who was standing with Daksh. They only exchanged greetings before the security head led us to the elevator.

The lift took us down to the ground floor. The speakers around the floor played Aaryan's live singing. On the other hand, Aaryan was entertaining the guests with his performance. Twirling the ladies who wanted to share a dance with him and Jaspreet was the first one to lay her hands on him.

The song was already in its second verse.

The security head stopped by a door, entering biometric and ID card authentication, opening the door for us to the surveillance room. He stood aside as Viaan and I entered behind Daksh and the security head in tow behind us. While Viaan took over a computer from a security member, Vikrant and Neel parked their car in Cradisson's parking lot. The offensive team from their security office sat in the van, not very far away. They were

all waiting for information. The information that we were extracting.

I could hear the chorus of the song play in the background.

One look at Viaan's face and I knew what I had to do. Not waiting around for orders, I started looking for the cameras which would give me a familiar view.

"There! The third video!" I pointed at the small division on the screen which showed the open door leading to a corridor. The same corridor that led to the bride's room.

"Are there cameras in that corridor?" Daksh inquired earning some heads shake negative in answer.

"Play the recording of the last twenty minutes," Daksh ordered, which the security guard obeyed sincerely. The first thing we saw was me walking out of the door. Not too long after that three more people went that way.

Losing his patience, Daksh played it in fast forward to find that two of them came back quickly and stopped at the only person who came back just two minutes prior to me. Printing the screen after zooming in, Daksh sent a copy of it to Vikrant and the offensive team who were already at the Cradisson's reception. It didn't take them long to find his whereabouts. Their live camera switched on letting Viaan play it live on the system he had taken from the security guard.

"Sha la la la

Sha la la la"

Aaryan was almost in the last part of the song when Vikrant knocked on the door of the suspect's room. Oblivious to the fate waiting for him on the other side of the door, the man opened it nonchalantly only to be pushed back into

the room as the two Raivardhans and the offensive team entered. The woman in the room, Kamini, let out a shrill cry in panic as both Kamini and the suspect stared wide-eyed at the lot standing before them. There wasn't a way out for either of them.

Daksh was on the phone with Neel who informed that they had our man. Meanwhile, Viaan had tracked the dangling chandelier which the stranger had unscrewed. Giving instructions to take care of it, Viaan signaled us to get back upstairs when the unexpectedly loud thud boomed through the floors. I jumped a good two feet up in the air before asking, "What was that?"

The song had only ended when the heart stopping sound like a bomb had gone off echoed through the speakers, followed by fearful screams from the audience.

Daksh stood there frozen watching the screen. Well, it wasn't just Daksh but everyone in the room, making me follow their gaze. When it registered to my anxious mind what had transpired, my voice died in the throat. So did my question. And I ended up in a similar condition as the others, shocked and blank.

The live footage of the fallen chandelier clenched my heart. But what made my heart fall further into my stomach was the unmoving waiter under the chandelier.

"Daksh!" Viaan yelled, causing Daksh to unfreeze and rush out of the room followed by the guards. The ringing of the phone filled the dead silence that had descended in the room.

The storm swirled in Viaan's eyes indicating the anger boiling beneath his skin. He answered the call and said just one line in a tone that could freeze a lake, "Get that bastard to me."

27. SATAIS PART II

"The accident at one of the reputed hotels by ARAIV has left everyone in shock. And with the knowledge that it was one of the Raivardhan events, it just rendered many more disturbed," a reporter in her early thirties, standing before the building I had been in the previous night, said.

The view disappeared and the screen ended up black, leaving only a reflection of Vikrant on it with the remote in his hand.

I whipped my head in his direction to watch him sit across from Asha, completely exhausted.

"Don't watch the news, yet. It will unnecessarily mess with your heads," Vikrant casually stated, picking the newspaper up just to toss it away upon seeing the headlines.

It had already embedded in my head for reading the same news around some twelve times since morning. I could tell the headlines verbatim: *Accident at Charm by ARAIV, fate or negligence?*

The vivid memory of the aftermath of the accident flashed before my eyes. I couldn't help but remember how cold and nonchalant Viaan had been.

The flashes and sounds of clicks filled the air. The blaring sirens and the flashing red and blue lights made the parking lot look more of a musical light show. My phone went off with another call from my parents, they had been calling for quite some time. Viaan had arranged them to leave ahead, to not get entangled in the mess we were in. The paparazzi surrounded us, shooting all sorts of questions. The waiter had deep wounds and was in a critical condition. Thankfully, he had been transferred to the nearest hospital at the earliest and Daksh had been beside him the entire time, trying his best to supply the first aid.

Vikrant and Neel hadn't returned to the hotel yet, while I and Asha were being escorted out with Viaan on our right and Aaryan to our left. Let me not forget the guards that surrounded us, pushing the horde of reporters away.

The chauffeur rushed to open the door of the car, giving the reporters enough time to bombard us with more questions.

"Do you know how it happened?"

"Is your staff so neglectful to let an event take place without proper measures of security taken?"

"Was it done intentionally?"

I opened my mouth to share the information about the person responsible for the incident. That way people would know that someone did it intentionally and the work for the police would be simplified. But before I could utter a word a hand snaked around my waist before squeezing my left wrist on the side warningly. I raised my head to watch Viaan already answering the reporters, "It must be an accident. The staff responsible for it shall be answering me soon and we have taken it upon ourselves to look after the welfare of the victim's family who was unfortunate. As well as his treatment will be funded by us."

With a nod, Viaan gently pushed me into the car before following behind. Asha and Aaryan had got into another car behind ours. As soon as the door closed behind him, I turned to Viaan and asked, "Why did you not tell about the person responsible for it? It would have been easier for us to proceed legally."

He didn't reply until the car started to move, making me believe that he wasn't going to answer me for a moment. But just for a moment.

"I don't need police and law involved in this, yet."

I gave him a blunt look. Like seriously? As if sensing my bewilderment he added, "We are the Raivardhans. We work differently, you will understand it soon enough."

I jerked back to the present when Daksh walked into the living room.

"How is he?" Asha asked him while he flexed his stiff neck. He had stayed the entire night at the hospital working with other doctors while the other Raivardhan brothers disappeared somewhere after dropping us ladies, back home.

They haven't returned home the entire night, making both me and Asha anxious until Vikrant walked through the door.

"He is in coma. His injuries were so severe that I hadn't been certain he could make it through the night," Daksh replied, slumping on the sofa and closing his eyes after putting his head back. He continued, "But since he's made it through the night, we can hope that he will be out of the coma but never certain. What's the status here?"

"Our men are working on the rest of him. He confessed about his part and the mastermind behind him. Neel is already onto the next step," Vikrant shrugged nonchalantly, making Daksh open his eyes.

"So, the others are with him?" Daksh questioned.

"Nope, training." Vikrant stood up from his place before asking, "You coming?"

"Give me a few minutes to freshen up." Daksh stretched before walking into his room.

"Training?" I couldn't help but ask Vikrant who picked an apple from the fruit bowl and bit into it.

"These boys regularly practice some outdoor sports and martial arts to keep themselves in shape and not lose their edge. To blow off some steam, you know, like a stress reliever," Asha smiled getting up from her place, "If you want, tag along with these two today. Perhaps, it will take your mind off of these events."

"She may run away screaming after witnessing what we are capable of," Vikrant commented, looking at the apple as if it was way more interesting than us before biting into it again.

"Then I'm definitely going." I lifted my chin defiantly at him. His words made me curious now. Right on cue, Daksh walked out of his room in a black undershirt, camouflage print joggers and training shoes. A black smartwatch strapped on his left wrist. He looked like a handsome cool guy from around the corner rather than a doctor at the moment. Even Vikrant had a similar attire on. Black hoodie, black biker cargo pants, and thick sole boots.

"Suit yourself," Vikrant smirked at me as he got up and walked out the door, making me and Daksh follow suit. We got off the elevator in the basement. A black convertible land rover defender stood ready. The valet passed the key to Vikrant who hopped into the driver's seat while Daksh rode shotgun. I wordlessly climbed into the backseat.

Within the next few seconds, we were already outside the house. Vikrant wasn't driving the car, he was *flying it...*

"Slow down, Vikrant! I am still young to die," I shouted over the wind. Yet, he didn't.

"Tell him to do something and he will make sure that he doesn't do it," Daksh replied in an amused tone, making me shake my head. That sounded so much like Vikrant, the cat-ish Raivardhan.

In the next half an hour, we were already on the outskirts of the city, that would have normally taken us an hour.

"You both aren't planning to murder me and then throw my body here, right?" I asked skeptically when little signs of civilization were in the line of sight.

"Kill you? Nah, that would be throwing our home theater out of the fifth floor's window. If you have to ask that question, you should be asking Viaan rather than us," Vikrant sniggered, making Daksh burst out laughing. I just glared daggers at both of them before enjoying the beauty of nature.

Vikrant slowed the Jeep down as we entered tall black gates. A huge board of '*Private Property: no trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted.*' stood majestically. The watchmen quickly closed the gate behind us, making me look around.

The forest stretched on either side of the road. Around two more kilometers of ride, the scenery started to clear into an open field. The sound of metal clashing rang through the air. And shortly two epee masked men in white fencing uniform came into view. The first one climbed over the fallen tree trunk, turned around in midair and slashed his epee through the air. The other one bent back dodging the metal before hitting his epee at the other's. The metal slipped through the former's hand and fell downwards. While the

owner of the falling epee reached to grab it, his opponent crouched down for another strike. The metal whistled through the air towards the former, who did a backflip at the right time as he caught his epee. Those two ran off into the woods as I got out of the Jeep.

"They seem to have started another bet," Daksh commented as he picked a bow and inspected it.

"Or Aaryan might have slashed through another one of Neel's shirt intentionally, like he did that one time," Vikrant smirked, picking up another bow.

"Run archery?" Daksh arched his eyebrows at Vikrant.

"Beat you to it," they both walked towards the other side of the woods, towards the targets placed in various styles and angles, leaving me alone to myself. I contemplated if I should follow after them or not when I heard the rhythm of hooves hitting the ground. The sound that always excited me. I could recognize it anywhere. The galloping of the horses.

I eagerly searched for the source of the sound, wanting to witness those majestic creatures run with their magnificent build. From the corner of the woods emerged the first horse, glistening like dark molten chocolate in the bright afternoon sun. Followed by half a dozen of white horses. They hurtled till they disappeared on the other side of the woods. The sound of the hooves behind me made me look over my shoulder.

There stood a midnight black horse, splendid and of an excellent breed. And upon it sat the man who captured my attention. He was in a white tank top and dark chinos. I could outline his muscles as they flexed. There was no doubt that my mouth hung low and probably even drool seeped out like a river as he stopped the majestic beast before me.

"What are you doing here?" His stern question snapped me out of my

swooning over him.

Remember Rynah, he was Viaan, Viaan Raivardhan. He doesn't need you swooning over him when he had the entire world to do the same.

I shrugged as a vague reply before my focus was taken up by the black beauty. The beautiful brown eyes were busy regarding the grass below as I carefully tiptoed towards it. I didn't want to freak it out, I just wanted to touch it. I had no hopes of riding it as it had been clear about how the horses reacted towards me. Especially after the incident at Batra's farm where the horses kicked Luv and Kush and dropped me off them.

I slowly raised my hand to touch the soft black mane on its body, already filled with adoration for the creature. For the first time, the horse leaned into my touch enjoying the little massage I was giving him. It felt like a miracle.

"Want to ride him?" I immediately looked up to meet Viaan's eyes to see if he was joking. I was surprised that he offered me to ride it and already brimming with delight to live the most awaited experience of my life. Upon finding no trace of humor on his face, I let an excited smile on as I nodded my head.

"Have you ridden a horse before?" He asked me, making me shake my head. Exhaling loudly, he extended his hand which I accepted eagerly. He pulled me up the saddle and sat me before him. Grabbing hold of the reins from around me, he explained, "These are reins that you use to control the horse." His cool breath hit the side of my neck as his chin hovered over my shoulder but I was busy with the feeling of euphoria.

I held them above his hands, feeling the leather ropes under my skin. I was so happy and thrilled to be sitting on the horse that I cared less about being pressed up against Viaan.

"Now, brace yourself," Viaan's voice finally seemed to kiss the insides of me as I turned over my shoulder to look at him. His eyes were trained ahead as

he moved the reins making the horse walk.

For the next half an hour he explained to me how to control the horse, letting me try it myself at a point. Surprisingly, Viaan was a good teacher, letting me grasp a few things at a time.

"Now, make him run," he ordered, testing the things that he had taught me and I did. The horse galloped, letting the air kiss my face. I let out a cheerful laugh as excitement took over me.

I did it! It was me who was riding the horse!

Me, the clumsy girl, Rynah Kundra! Sorry, Raivardhan, Rynah Raivardhan! The horse ran through the woods, reached a lake, then I deviated it towards the compound before taking it back the way we had come. And all this time, Viaan sat quietly behind me, not interfering with anything I did. And I was grateful for that.

When we reached the clearing, I slowly pulled the rein as I exerted pressure over the seat. The horse slowed down before coming to a stop. The rest of the Raivardhans had already assembled there. Neel was shrugging on his jacket while Aaryan was tying his shoelaces. Vikrant and Daksh had been leaning over the trees when Viaan helped me hop down.

"Whoa! What is this? Craziess was right here the entire time, and I just learned about it?" Aaryan teased me by making me roll my eyes.

"You would have seen her earlier if you weren't busy getting your ass kicked," Viaan commented, jumping down behind me.

"Hey! I kicked his ass, not get mine kicked," Aaryan exclaimed, throwing a broken twig towards Neel.

"Like I let you," Neel sneered at him playfully.

"Don't be shy, bro. Admitting your failure makes you a humble person." Aaryan put an arm around Neel's shoulder teasingly, making him push his little brother away as he countered, "then admit it, humble person, that you cheated yet again."

Aaryan opened his mouth to continue but was beaten by someone else.

"Shut up, you two," Viaan rubbed his forehead as he picked his denim jacket. The silence remained for a few seconds before Aaryan placed his hands over my shoulders and started to guide me towards the diverging roads ahead of Vikrant's Jeep.

"Where are you taking her?" Neel shouted from behind making Aaryan shout back over his shoulder, "to the ice cream parlor. I need to cool this heat down."

Now that he mentioned it, I realized that I was sweating profusely. The humid air felt kind of sticky on the skin. The other two cars sat like wildcats hidden behind the bushes. And being sports model, camouflaged them well, so did the black and green color of the body.

Aaryan unlocked the green Lamborghini Huracan and climbed into the driver seat letting me in the passenger.

As soon as he started the car, I turned to him and ordered, "Okay spill."

He turned to regard me with raised eyebrows, "I have nothing to spill."

"Now, don't act too innocent, you are anything but that. What is it that you are planning?"

"I am more of a good person than you give me credit for, Crazy," he chuckled while driving out of another set of black gates on the other side of whatever this place was. Similar to before, the watchmen closed the gate soon

after we joined the other vehicles on the highway.

"I still don't believe that." My eyes had narrowed at his words making him chortle some more.

"And I had a feeling that you wouldn't."

The drive to the ice cream parlor didn't even last for fifteen minutes. Aaryan glided the car into the parking lot before perfectly sliding it into the available space like a professional driver.

I didn't wait for him to permit me, I was already out of the car and almost into the Baskin-Robbins when I heard Aaryan's amused chuckle. The parlor had been pretty much empty with lots of places available to sit.

I was selecting the flavor when Aaryan came to stand beside me.

"One Tiramisu and," he looked at me to let me finish my order, "Chocolate chip cookie dough."

The server handed Aaryan the ice creams as I sat down at one of the tables. He handed over my cookie dough ice cream letting me melt away in its goodness. We ate in silence till something crawled into my thoughts.

I looked at Aaryan who had been busy biting the chocolate decoration on the ice cream when I asked him, "Does Viaan love horses? Why was he simply riding the horse when the rest of you were busy with convoluted activities?"

He looked up from his ice cream giving me a lopsided smile, "You think Viaan bro was doing a simple task?" His snorting led me further into bafflement.

"He was target practicing on horseback." Informing casually, Aaryan went back to eating his ice cream.

"Target practicing? He didn't have any bow on him."

"He doesn't use bows. He likes his guns, with a silencer on." Aaryan bit into the wafer cone. My mouth dropped open at his answer. Viaan was practicing with guns and I had been sitting before him, pressed up against him, totally oblivious? *The heights of naivety!*

More than my naivety, it must be the other things that swallowed the gun's sound around us, like the horses galloping, the sound of fencing and of course my extreme excitement to be riding a horse that nothing else mattered.

"By the way, our big mother's birthday is next month. How are your dancing skills?" Aaryan threw a curious look at me.

"You don't put dance and me in the same sentence. We are the opposite poles of the earth," I snorted. Pun intended.

"You better start practicing. We usually have a dancing ritual at the party. All the members of Raivardhan family should be flaunting out their dancing skills there. It's a compulsion, like a tradition."

Huh, tradition? I so badly wanted to laugh right now. But I resorted to maintaining a neutral face.

"And who's gonna teach me how to dance?" I raised my eyebrow tauntingly.

Aaryan exhaled loudly as a wicked glint sparkled in his eyes, though he had a defeated expression on, "Who else? The one and only..."

I waited for him to complete it though I had a hunch that he would say his own name like a narcissist he was. I casually licked the creamy part of the ice cream only to choke on it when he completed the sentence and said the name I had never expected. Coughing vigorously, I kept hitting my chest to ward it off.

Aaryan watched me like an innocent little bystander while his eyes shone with amusement.

Cough, "What did you," *another cough*, "Say? Who," *another cough*, "Will teach me?" then I resumed my vigorous coughing.

"Why so surprised? Who else but," Aaryan paused to let out an unintentional smirk before completing, "Vikrant?"

Please, someone, stab me with a spoon. Now!

28. ATHAIS

"No."

We had only entered the living room and that was the first word that came out of my mouth when Aaryan had again opened his mouth to say something. And that something was something that I didn't want to hear. You get what I mean, right? Right? Just forget it...

He closed his mouth and raised his eyebrow in amusement. His arms crossed across his chest, waiting for my explanation as if he was getting one.

I turned around to find Neel who had paused to watch our little show unfold instead of reading whatever interesting file he was holding. Yeah, the black and white papers would be much more interesting than the little circus that Aaryan had trying to pull off.

"Will you at least—" I cut Aaryan off in the middle saying, "What part of 'N' and 'O' put together did you not understand?"

"Fine. Do as you wish," Aaryan whined as he tiredly sat down on the sofa, sighing in resignation. Thank goodness, he had finally decided to give up!

He had been bugging me for the past two hours about the same thing. Dancing.

And my reply had been adamant. NO!

I turned around to walk towards my room when I heard Aaryan grumble, "Let me see what she will do when all the other girls buzz around Viaan for a dance at the party. And then I will taunt her with '*I told you so*'."

I didn't know where my temper had been to fill my veins instantaneously. Maybe the vivid imagination of girls flocking around my husband making him pick one of them while pushing me out of their way did the trick. I whipped around to face my annoying brother-in-law, exclaiming, "Like in hell I would allow that!"

I didn't know if I indeed saw it or not, but I think I saw something like a wicked glint pass through his eyes before he looked annoyed.

"Yeah, like you would, in hell," he replied tauntingly.

"No one gets their claws on that jerk, except for me. Only I have the right to stamp on his toes for the path of the fire," I said, raising my chin causing both the brothers to raise their eyebrows.

"[Agneepath](#), you know?" I scanned both of their faces for any traces of understanding but instead found amusement.

"Then... Vikrant is available in his room at the moment." Aaryan gestured towards the stairs.

"Why do you have to be so stubborn in making me ask Vikrant about it? Why don't you teach me?"

I wanted to avoid that cat-ish Raivardhan as much as possible. He gave me chills like no one else, and mind my words they weren't of the good type.

Aaryan gave me a sarcastic smile as he sadistically replied, "Because I enjoy witnessing your misery and Vikrant's annoyance."

He clapped his hands together and spoke like a jolly little kid on his way to a field trip, "Oh boy! What fun it would be to watch you both! No one can irritate him more than you."

The wriggling of his eyebrows earned him a smack from the cushion that I threw, only making him laugh like a lunatic he was. I seriously pitied the girl who was going to marry him.

Finally, having had enough of Aaryan's josh, Neel took mercy upon me and explained, "He's being an idiot as always. It's just that Vikrant used to be a dance teacher."

The limits of my astonishment crossed a new level after registering the words that came out of Neel's mouth.

"What?" That single word showed how surprised I had been on hearing what I heard. Vikrant and dance? Those two in the same sentence. I had never expected to hear something like that! It was downright outrageous! But in case it was the truth, I couldn't help but be curious about what type of dance he had mastered.

"Which type?" I couldn't stop the words from rolling out of my mouth. And did I really want to know about it? I so badly wanted to cover my mouth with my hands, just to gag myself and regret what I was going to hear. I knew for sure, whatever form of dance it was, it surely wasn't classical or folk dance. Imagine Vikrant doing Kathak, or let me not for my well being...

When I thought that the brothers hadn't heard my question, I was proved wrong. And the name of the dance style that Aaryan had answered made me want to facepalm myself.

He had only stated one word with a shark's smile, "Salsa."

Seriously, what was I getting myself into?

"You what?" Vikrant snorted from behind his table looking at me like I was cracking jokes over here. His eyes never left me while chuckling a bit before bursting out into full on laughter, at my expense. I just stared at him resembling a lost puppy when he was having a laughing fit.

All of a sudden he stopped and stared into my eyes with a sinister expression. "No."

As expected of him... A straight out *no*.

"Come on, Viky, can't you do that little thing for your only sister-in-law, Pweeaaase?" I asked in a child's voice, giving him my best puppy eyes. I had not used the cute side of me for a long time now, but desperate times need desperate measures.

He got up making me mirror his actions as he replied, "First of all, don't *ever* call me that again and second, the answer is still no. So, kindly leave, I have got work to do and, never raise this topic ever again."

He walked to the door and opened it before gestured me to head outside. I walked out of the door just to pause by a step or two outside it and looked at him, "This doesn't mean it's over, Kaaliya, I will be back."

He didn't respond nor acknowledge it, just closed the door on my face becoming the reason for my pout.

"Now what do I do?"

The mission looked almost impossible, but my determination wasn't as weak either. Over the course of the next three days, I followed Vikrant all over the house, bugging him to tutor me. And all those times, he being the heartless jerk he was, just said the same old one word, "No."

I had tiptoed to stand by the open fridge door as he was busy taking out a water bottle and even before I could open my mouth and he could close the door, he said, "No."

He hadn't even looked at me! What a jerk!

Another time when he was watching a movie in the mini theater and as soon as he saw me, he slipped out of the room and rushed to his bedroom while having me running on his heels, pleading all the way. Actually, yelling... But he got into his room and shut the door close yelling a single, loud and clear, "No!"

He left the movie incomplete just to avoid me!

And then, there was that time when I was waiting by the elevator for him to come home. When the glass elevator came to stop with my eldest brother-in-law standing inside, engrossed in his mobile and letting my hopes get high. But Vikrant being *Vikrant the jerk*, as soon as the elevator doors opened and he looked at me and immediately hit another button to shut it close and went back down before I could even react.

I swear, even Viaan wouldn't have been this difficult! And to add to my frustration, Aaryan openly displayed how much he was enjoying it! Let me not forget Neel. He wasn't as transparent as Aaryan but he sure was enjoying the free show. While the remaining three Raivardhans were very much bemused with what was going on.

"I give up!" I sank onto the sofa on the fourth day when Vikrant had literally run from the dining room leaving his breakfast incomplete on seeing me get down the stairs.

"So soon? I had hoped better from you, Mrs. Viaan. Tsk, such a disappointment," Aaryan teasingly shook his head like a disappointed grandpa.

"I swear, even Mount Everest would have taken pity on me and agreed to teach me dancing if I would have worked this hard. But Vikrant is a bigger cold rock than Mount Everest," I sighed loudly, closing my eyes.

"Really now? Is that how you think of the person who is going to be your mentor?" I snapped my eyes open and sat up straight just to come face to face with my eldest brother-in-law who had his hands crossed over his chest and an eyebrow raised in question.

"V-Vikrant, it was just a joke! You know me, right? How much of a jokester I am! I knew that you had a heart made up of gold. Right, Aaryan?" I forced a nervous chuckle before turning to find a *bent over the sofa and vibrating while punching the cushion* Aaryan. It didn't take a genius to understand that he was rolling on the sofa laughing.

Delivering a hard enough punch at Aaryan's upper arm, I turned to Vikrant while Aaryan tried gaining control over his laughter as he spoke in a hoarse voice, "yes... Jokester that... She is."

And without any restraints, he burst out into another fit of laughter causing me to push him away.

Ignoring his youngest brother, Vikrant looked at me with a stern expression, "If I am doing this, I will do it by my rules. And you break any, find yourself another teacher. Be in the gym sharp at six, a second later, you will be penalized for it."

He immediately turned around to leave, making me quickly voice out the dilemma, "Six in the evening?"

Vikrant turned sideways to glance at me over his shoulder, "Six a.m, in the morning."

And just like that, he was off leaving me to gulp the suddenly formed knot in

my throat.

"Rynah, Rynah, Rynah. The actual fun starts now," I swear I could hear Aaryan's smirk through his voice.

What had he got you into this time, Rynah?

And the answer to that question came as a bone-chilling cold shower in the bed. I had been drenched from top to bottom, wide awake and panting for air.

"What was that about?" I exclaimed lividly when I found the culprit behind my sleep being snatched. Vikrant kept the empty bucket down and directed a stern look towards me, "That was the alarm that you forgot to set. It's one past six. You are already late. You have ten minutes to change and come down to the gym to serve your penalty."

He walked out of the room leaving me gaping. I had only overcome my morning panics in the Raivardhan mansion which Vikrant didn't seem to be happy about. So, he was giving me new reason to panic in the morning...

"Nine minutes thirty seconds. Twenty-nine. Twenty-eight," his voice faded but not my panic. Quickly casting a glance beside me to find an empty space, I rushed to the washroom to get ready. All the while thinking where Viaan had disappeared. We had sort of come to an agreement to divide the bed into two halves, his half and my half after the horse riding incident. Like the civilized husband and wife that we were, we now shared the bed, ignoring the fact that he still used to sleep in his bed every night after I would have succumbed to my slumber. And I didn't exactly have time to discuss the sleeping arrangements before that. Also ignoring the fact that he listened to me with amusement etched on his face as if I was dancing before him rather than discussing our sleeping arrangements.

But him not being on his side of the bed this early in the morning, kept me thinking about it.

Wow, Rynah! You have started worrying about your husband! My inner voice taunted, making me groan out loud.

Worry? No way! I was just curious about his whereabouts. I cleared it to my inner voice.

Getting ready as quickly as possible, I rushed down in my tank top and biker joggers. On the way, I found Viaan still in his nightwear talking over his laptop in some foreign language, inside the library. And the sound of another male's reply from the other side of the laptop made me release a breath I didn't even know I was holding.

Not worried? Really? The taunt of my inner voice made me roll my eyes.

I don't know where and why my internal monologue had been activated all of a sudden but I surely wasn't enjoying its company.

I jogged to stand before the door of the gym and took a deep breath before entering. Vikrant in his undershirt and tracks was standing by the speakers and looking at something over the tablet.

"You are ten minutes and fifteen seconds late," his words automatically made me glance at the clock on the wall to find that I was right on time. It was ten past six at the moment, I HAD made it in the stipulated time that he had granted me.

As if hearing my thoughts, he answered, "The time you took to freshen up was the penalty time. You missed ten minutes of your lesson. Tomorrow, be ready by six, not a second late. Now, come in and do twenty push-ups as a penalty."

I had my jaw dropped open at his words.

"Five more gets added after every ten seconds of you wasting my precious

time, twenty-five now."

That was what had me running to the center of the room to do twenty-five push-ups...

I had had this feeling for the whole night that I wasn't requesting dance tutorials but rather a military training. And Vikrant was the perfect example of the reincarnation of Genghis Khan training his soldiers.

29. UNTEES

“I,” I panted before continuing,

"can't" another hungry gulp of deep breath, "do it."

There! Finally, I was able to get those words out before going into my dog mode and gulping air till my lungs hurt. An upside-down view of a sadistically grinning Aaryan came before my eyes.

"So soon?" His tone was enough for me lunged from my sprawled-out position on the gym floor, ready to strangle him. It seems that he had been expecting it, he took an elegant step back like a dancing buck letting me crash again on the floor before him. *Such a gentleman, I tell you...*

My body felt like it had been hit by a train moving at eighty miles per hour, instead of the floor and I was cent percent sure that I was stinking, very badly.

Aaryan crouched before me as he clicked his tongue, "Looks like there was an extensive dance practice."

"Except dance, he made me practice everything," I grumbled with my cheek still planted on the cool artificial turf of the gym, "Tell me one thing, did he indeed happen to be a dance teacher or was he in the army and you both wanted to have some fun at my expense?"

"Actually, both." Aaryan gave me his Cheshire cat smile before continuing,

"He was a dance teacher before he voluntarily joined the army for a period."

"No wonder he confused his dance steps with muscle building," I huffed sitting up while Aaryan was laughing his ass off. I was thanking God for sending Vikrant out after two hours of intensive training, while he was planning to go straight for four hours. Apparently, something urgent required of his presence, sabotaging his plan of torturing me.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," the deep voice induced a shiver down my spine. I looked up to see Viaan standing in all his suited glory. His wet hair tamed back indicating that it wasn't long since he had that shower. Aaryan composed himself and cleared his throat, "Not at all brother."

"Be ready by seven in the evening. We have an event to attend," Viaan looked at me as he ordered.

"Another one?" The test for my strength had crossed its highest limit from all the parties we had to attend the last few days. Even though it had been my wedding, it tired me out to no end. I couldn't get up from this floor and he was expecting me to attend another one of those parties especially after undergoing Vikrant's path of pain?

"Get used to them. That will be something that you will be attending almost every other day," Viaan replied, ready to turn around to leave, to have no further argument over the topic. But I had other plans.

"Why? Why does it have to be me?" I whined, grabbing enough strength to stand up and ambled sluggishly to stand before him. I just wanted to have some peaceful sleep at the moment while even the idea of attending another party was on the edge of giving me constipation. A terrible stomach aching constipation, which I was so not ready for.

"Because you are my wife," he replied, turning around and walking out. And I, being my crazy self, followed him out, as well as yelling behind, "I didn't

ask to be!"

He didn't even care to acknowledge my words, making me more frustrated.

"If I have ended up being married to you, definitely there must be some fault in my stars!" My remark made Viaan turn to look me in the eye. In three swift long strides, he covered the distance between us, all the while his jaw ticking.

"Hello! There is no fault in your stars, the entire fault is in you!" He exclaimed tapping my temple, implying that it was my brain, more accurately, or my level of processing.

"And you would blame everything on me, right?" That was it, I snapped at him.

Not feeling the burn of the anger dull inside my chest, I continued, "I wouldn't be here mister, if you hadn't kidnapped me for three days for no reason! I am the one trapped with a psychotic person, here!" I threw my hands in the air, exaggeratedly while simultaneously eyeing him from head to toe letting him know who I was referring to.

He clenched his jaws.

Are you feeling annoyed, Mr. Viaan Raivardhan? Good, I did hit your nerves somewhere, at last.

Taking a deep breath to hold his resurfacing irritation down, Viaan stepped forward making me take my steps back. I freaked out at his sudden advance and wanted to maintain as much distance as possible.

"You see, it's still your damn fault. If you had not entered my office when I wasn't there, you would have been happily married to that old sweetheart of yours and I would have been free from all this trouble. You are nothing but

walking-talking trouble that I have hung around my neck. Great respect for Mr. Nath for wanting to marry you. You must be really missing him very much by now." He breathed calmly but I still got those chills. I agreed that I was causing him nothing but trouble, most of the time. Not that I wanted to but when things happen, they happen. And coming to Surya Kanth Nath, I didn't miss that sort-of-ex-fiance of mine. Not one a bit.

In fact, it gave me goosebumps to even think about that '*pedophile*' as aunt Lasika used to call him. I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn't notice Viaan leaning forward.

I just thanked the lord that I hadn't jumped in startle when he whispered in my ears making more shocks roll down my spine, "Again, no fault in your stars, but the entire fault is yours. And like a little demon that you are, you dragged me in it too."

He straightened up to look at me with a satisfied expression and when he found me open and closed my mouth numerous times, completely speechless, his satisfied smile was replaced by that arrogant smirk of his.

Intending to make a dramatic exit, he cleared his throat haughtily and turned on his heels for the second time in the last ten minutes. He started to walk down the corridor.

Really though, I must have committed a severe crime without my knowledge for ending up with the king of jerks, but then sometimes he does make me question myself about the image of his that I have had painted inside my head. And my sins couldn't have been that bad, right?

"My fault mustn't have been so bad if I've ended up married to you," I looked down mumbling to myself and then looked up only to find Viaan halted even not two steps away from me.

"What did you say?" His deep voice asked with a touch of surprise making

my eyes widened with the realization that he had heard what I had mumbled to myself.

"Nothing," I swiftly replied without a second thought.

He looked over his shoulder, his eyes harboring indecipherable emotions, "but I heard something else."

"Your ears are ringing."

Immediately, I turned around and rushed towards the gym to prevent him from further questioning me. Me and my big stupid mouth! God, have some mercy upon it!

Rynah Rynah?

Yes papa

Did you kill Viaan?

No papa

Telling lies?

No papa

Then show me Viaan

Ha ha ha...

If I had to describe my mental condition in one line, it would be - gone insane due to boredom.

And to top it all with a cherry, Viaan reached my limit of patience for an entire year, which was already very low. Right at six in the evening, I had been woken up from my precious sleep, tied to a chair while the makeup artist and the hairstylist worked on mine. Even after my continuous struggling, nagging, threatening and cursing. And the reason for such a pitiful condition of mine hadn't even cared to make his appearance before me till I

was pushed inside the awaiting car. If it wasn't for Asha, I would have still been tied to the chair wriggling.

I had missed my mini supper making me more cranky and Viaan had the audacity to show me to the people around us like I was a museum artifact. If it was just that, I would have been saner than I was right now. He had to go and crack jokes at my expense and laugh at them! As if I wasn't standing right beside him all the time!

Even now, he was commenting something about me being a mardy marmot. That did the trick, I whipped around to face him, with the nastiest glare I could muster with my drained strength.

"This is all your fault! I would have been really happy without you in my life!" I was so pissed at the amused looking Viaan that I felt like pulling my hair and then pulling his.

What was his problem with life? He had me attending an annual get together of companies with all sorts of business folks. There were CEOs of big MNCs and then there were managers of little hypermarkets. And I didn't need Viaan to drive me crazy before the entire corporate world at the moment.

"You mean to say you were ready to marry that grandpa guy instead of me?" Viaan placed his hand over his mouth to hide the upward curl of his lips. He sure was in a good mood making mine even fouler.

"Ready? I would be happier as hell to have been married to him than you!" My conscience was shaking her head at me.

Lying is bad Rynah... You were ready to die instead of marrying that pedophile.

I was but he would be much better than this arrogant jerk here! How bad could he have been?

"There," Viaan pointed towards the back profile of a familiar-looking man, smirking. I didn't understand what he was trying to tell initially until I recognized the half-bald person dressed in a suit as he laughed. The key feature to recognize him was the vortex baldness and that peculiar crying-snorting laugh.

"Your *ex-fiance*," Viaan's whisper in my ear let his breath fan my skin and cause shivers to roll down my spine. At that point, I didn't understand if it was because of Viaan or Mr. Nath. My eyes were saucer wide, unable to digest the fact that I would have had to spend my entire life with such a bizarre fellow if Viaan hadn't stepped in.

"I wonder what your expression would have been at the moment if I had let him marry you?" There was amusement and tease in his voice.

I swore to god that I would never think about that man ever again.

"Since you found your happiness with such a decent looking greybeard, instead of a rich, handsome, well-built CEO like me. Let me not take your happiness," Viaan grabbed me by my hand and dragged me towards my *ex-fiance*.

"Huh? I mean... What? Wait! What are you doing?" Even me digging my heels in the ground didn't help. Viaan was stronger than me.

"Why? I'm only reuniting old lovers."

And before I could say anything, Viaan tapped over Surya Kanth Nath's shoulder grabbing his attention. Awkwardness settled into my whole being, making me shift my weight from one foot to another.

"Oh my goodness! What brings the CEO of the ARAIV group to my lowly existence?" It was clear as water, Surya Kanth Nath was surprised to see Viaan standing before him.

"Nothing much, Mr. Nath. Just Rynah over here missed your company terribly. She wanted to spend some time with you," my jaw hit the floor when those words left Viaan's mouth! That signature smirk on his face was openly directed towards me. My eyes shifted from Viaan to Mr. Surya Kanth Nath who was just as flabbergasted as me but soon recovered from the initial shock and beamed so widely that his jaws could have come out of the space if they weren't attached to his skull.

"Oh! That's so sweet of her. Of course, I missed you too. Unfortunately, it was your dad's decision to marry you off to Mr. Raivardhan, since he was all over the talks. Had I known that you felt something more for me, you would have personally talked to your father about it and we could have married," the mouth of Mr. Surya Kanth Nath didn't seem to stop, leaving me to silently go into fumes. That liar raised hopes of a talkative old man! Like I even ever missed this chatterbox! I was willing Viaan to look at me for once so that he could see how death would look when it came. Already millions of ways to kill him had started formulating in my brain.

"I'll let you both have some privacy," smirking, the handsome devil turned to leave but not before winking at me.

"Such a wonderful timing we collided into each other," Mr. Surya Kanth Nath patted my upper arm, attracting my attention. And I didn't know what to do except force a chuckle out of my lips. I was definitely going to kill that hot ass of a jerk tonight!

30. TEES

The parking lot was empty, except for the cars. The music echoed from above and provided a cover for the unintended softer sounds. Not a single witness in the line of eyesight.

I quickly looked around to find an empty ceiling. No CCTV cameras. This was the moment and the place I had been waiting for the entire evening. A perfect place for any secret activity to transpire. By secret activity I meant something like unshareable action like doing a funny dance or committing a merciless cold-blooded murder of a jerk-ass. The tiring evening and the lack of sleep had awakened a criminal mastermind inside me. And the striding figure of my *darling* husband, a few steps ahead of me, had me go into my calculative mode that I didn't even know I had.

Continuously kicking him where the sun didn't shine would deliver him a slow and painful death, right? Or I'd rather enjoy choking him to death with my bare hands while he pleaded for my mercy. And the sound of the second option sounded really appealing. He came to stop before a black Benz that took me a second to recognize.

Oh! That was the car we had come in earlier!

Before he could get in, I swiftly removed my heels and stretched my toes, feeling them alive after surviving the heels. While he was fishing for the car keys, I crouched down a bit, readying myself before running in his direction.

I was careful enough not to make a single noise, unlike the last time I had let out the war cry before charging in, and jumped on his back taking him by surprise, latching myself onto him like a baby monkey on its mother's back. The only difference here was my hands were rather strangling '*my handsome monkey mother*'. I didn't give a damn that my evening dress had pooled around my hips, showcasing the full length of my naked legs for the hungry eyes of the walls.

Reflexively, Viaan caught hold of my wrists reducing the pressure of my death grip before he turned around thrashing my back into the side of the car but I hung on, bearing the pain that pinched me in the back. My war cry had finally come out.

Anybody watching me now would definitely think me to be a lunatic and I was, after living with this jerk, I definitely was.

"Rynah! Get down!" He yelled back trying to push me back.

"You idiotic jerk! What do you get by making my life miserable?" The frustration I was harboring all these days exploded. And the satisfaction of choking this rascal below me was so good that I didn't even care if the police arrested me after this. Nor did I care that I would be a widow just after a few days of our marriage. To be honest, that idea started to sound very good. Sadistic of me, I know. But that would only happen when Viaan would let me kill him.

Realizing that I wasn't letting him go so easily, Viaan started to pull my hands away from his neck. The thing that annoyed me more was how easily he did it. He peeled my hands off like they were mere leaves on a tree branch. I exerted all my energy to overcome his herculean strength to no avail.

All I could do was tighten my legs around his muscular waist hoping to squeeze his abdominal cavity into his diaphragm. That should at least keep him in bed for a month, right? And by bed, I meant hospital bed. Although,

nothing affected him.

What was this guy made of? Iron? Steel? That was what it felt like.

One of Viaan's hand grabbed my upper hand and swung my body to his front. And I slid around his waist just to be thrashed against the car bonnet. In a blink of an eye, he shackled my wrists with his hands on either side of my head. I could feel a few strands of Viaan's hair in my fist. Must have come out when I subconsciously pulled at his hair. My eyes took in his less than perfect self. His neatly styled hair now looked like a chewed up brush. His suit crinkled, there even was a tear in his shirt giving a glimpse of his delicious golden skin hidden beneath it. And then there were three red scratch marks darkening on the side of his neck. It didn't need the genius to figure out who made those marks. **Cough* Me. *Cough**

Yet he looked so sexy...

And then there was that pissed off look, like shouting at the top of his voice, *'What in the hell is wrong with you, woman?'*

Just as I expected, he shouted at my face, "What the hell? Are you crazy? You don't do something that wild without a death wish, mad woman!"

Looks like I have finally started understanding the *great* Viaan Raivardhan, or at least his pissed off part.

"What if I am?" I raised my nose in the air with the air of arrogance. He sure was rubbing off on me.

"You!" He let go of my wrists while his hands advanced towards my neck as he growled but his self-control was much more strong than mine as pulled back his fists, gritting his teeth. Shortly after he ran his hand through his hair, definitely frustrated, before slamming his fist beside my head once, giving me a mini heart attack. The glare he gave me felt like an old buddy. That was

when he grabbed hold of my statue still hands again.

Mental facepalm... Why hadn't I moved them? What had I been waiting for? For him to hold them again?

"You are the only girl to get on my nerves this way! I don't raise my hand on ladies but you make me want to snap that delicate looking neck of yours like a twig. If only you weren't a girl..."

"Hickory Dickory Dock. What you have said is all just talk. Viaan, if you remember, you did manhandle me like I was a guy when you locked me up in the room," he protested upon hearing my words, "that was one time when I had lost control of my temper. Your intentions looked malicious and I had to protect my family. I will cross any limit to protect my loved ones."

"You didn't even care to listen to me, all you did was act impulsively! You didn't even care that I was your employee!"

"Ah, you still are." His four words completely diverted my attention.

"What? No! I quit, for your kind information. Having you, a barbaric jerk, as my boss? Well, no thank you." I tried freeing my hands from his but he didn't even budge, just stared into my eyes.

"Ironic, isn't it?" He asked as hints of amusement tainted his eyes and the edge of his lips curled up into a ghost of a smile.

"What?" I couldn't help but ponder what he was referring to.

"You didn't even want me as your boss but ended up becoming my wife. By the way, I'm still waiting for that resignation letter to reach my table." His breath hit my lips making me realize how close we had gotten. I could feel him above my dress, every part lined up against mine, my naked legs felt the feel of his suit on their length. He was wearing a different cologne today but I

could still make out the smell of his regular soap and shampoo.

Unintentionally, my eyes raked through his features, from his molten chocolate eyes which had something dark hidden behind them, down the straight bridge of his nose and then to his dark mustache before finally settling on his perfect lips surrounded by his groomed facial hair. Had he reduced the distance between us subconsciously or was he this close right from the start?

"Shall I take a picture for you? They last longer." The curling of his lips into his annoying smirk with those taunting words had me snap back to look in his eyes.

"Oh I forgot, you don't need pictures since you had the *real* one," involuntarily my eyes squeezed shut when his mocking hit my ears. He had seen it, he had seen me openly drooling over him, more like under him and was evidently amused at my expense by delivering my very own words right back at me.

Blood immediately rushed into my cheeks, due to embarrassment or anger, I didn't know. My eyes flew open when I felt my hand released from his restraint and his presence over me disappeared. My legs had automatically dropped to the floor letting me stand when he took a few steps away from me.

What made him do that, I didn't have a clue until a giggle from the other end of the parking lot penetrated through my ears. With eyes wider than saucers, my head snapped in the direction to find Mr. and Mrs. Tekur standing by a car while Mrs. Tekur blushed and giggled profusely. The blush on my cheeks darkened when I realized what it had looked like from their perspective, especially when the skirt of my evening gown was still improper.

My hands started to straighten them down while the first sentence that escaped my lips in our defense was, "It isn't what it looks like!"

Mental facepalm... Stupid stupid Rynah! Can't keep your big mouth closed for a split second!

"Sorry for disturbing you two, we didn't know what was going on here. Remember to get a room next time, Mr. Raivardhan," Mr. Tekur saluted before getting into the car and Mrs. Tekur following suit.

"No, it's not-" Viaan's chuckle interrupted my sentence, "You just confirmed it to them by saying something *that* predictable."

My cheeks were burning red. I could pop some corn kernels on them. The honking made me turn to face a smirking Viaan who had taken his seat in the driver's side, making me go around the car to climb into the passenger's side. And the rest of the way, I pretended to sleep to avoid being teased by him just to end up actually falling asleep.

Rynah, Rynah.

The voice sounded familiar yet not very familiar.

Rynah, wake up.

Again the same voice came from the dark making me frown trying to focus.

Do you want me to let Vikrant wake you up instead?

"Vikrant?" My eyelids flew up in horror letting me stare into the familiar molten chocolates, setting the calmness into me. I haven't had any panic attacks lately. Maybe, I was getting used to these surroundings.

"Yeah, he's waiting outside. Something about dance practice," Viaan explained in his bed voice before rolling back on his side and pulling the duvet till his waist. I just kept looking at his back profile, still unable to take

out two facts out of my head.

First being Vikrant waiting to torture me for straight two hours. And second, was that Viaan had a sexy bed voice.

Stupid Rynah, get your head out of the gutter! My inner voice scolded me.

Shaking my head clear of the thoughts, I quickly freshened up and rushed for my practice thinking about how I had ended up in the bed. Had Viaan brought me back to the room like he had done numerous times before?

"497... 498... 499." And then I fell thump on the ground, breathing heavily.

"Get up and start again. You didn't reach the target," Vikrant ordered from the bench while flipping through whatever file he was holding.

"But I just missed one number," I whined from the ground, not being able to feel my legs. I had jumped rope around a thousand times after restarting twice for pausing in the middle.

"Don't nag, get up and start again."

It was crystal clear, he was punishing me for bugging him to teach me dancing.

"But Vikrant, this is not even dancing! You are training me to join an army! Definitely not dancing!" I sat up, throwing my hands in the air.

He kept his file aside, stood up and quickly came to stand before me, "You think this is all unnecessary and want me to go straight for dance lessons?"

I just kept staring at his narrowed eyes gulping the knot that had formed out of nowhere.

Oh no! He was going to kick me out of his training now!

Stupid stupid Rynah! Couldn't you keep your big mouth shut for once!?!

"Then you do the homework about the basics of the dance and be here sharp at eight in the evening," he turned on his heels and walked out grumbling about me being a nagger. That left me gawking at his retreating figure.

Was he really Vikrant? Or was it some alien in Vikrant's skin?

Well, whatever it was, I was grateful to be exempted from being tortured like a militant trainee. Slowly getting up and limping out of the gym, I headed for the elevator. A long bath sounded really good to relax my aching muscles.

"No, we had Chop Suey the last time. Cancel it from our menu. Put on Japchae this time for the noodles dish. And cake pops instead of tarts," I heard Asha's voice from the library making me halt to peep inside. Ash had been surrounded by numerous people. Some were making notes, others were showing her pictures before barking orders to the former ones.

"Keep the cake classic white. No changes there," she instructed looking at another picture.

It looked like the men weren't that good at keeping secrets. Asha was planning her own birthday now.

"And the appetizers, madam?" A man with clean shave asked in a British accent.

"You know, Russel. The men did make it clear, right? Appetizers are, as usual, your signature ones." Asha kept another picture aside as she looked up and found me eavesdropping.

"Rynah dear? What are you doing there?" And it looked like I wasn't an

expert at hiding either. I just gave her an embarrassed smile and walked in when she signaled me to come in.

"Everyone, this is my daughter-in-law and Viaan's wife, Rynah Raivardhan. And Rynah, they are the master chefs from around the world, who take care of the food at our parties," she introduced us briefly. And immediately, I was swallowed by the crowd of master chefs and their introductions.

"Mrs. Raivardhan, a pleasure to meet ya! Am Phillipa Pierre 'nd this is Alice Cook, my PA. We're from the land down unda'. Cakes 're my forte," A blonde chef spoke, giving me a quick handshake before gesturing towards another blonde standing a few feet away from her.

"And I am Joshua Petit, a Patissier from France. And this is my PA, Theodore Blanc," a dark-skinned man gave me an air kiss on my cheeks followed by a red-haired guy doing the same. It went on till all of them introduced themselves to me. The discussion about the dishes went on for another half an hour before they left the library in silence.

"The men aren't good at keeping secrets, are they?" I broke the silence while watching out of the giant glass wall towards my aunt's house. It reminded me of the time I and Anjali stalked Daksh making me cringe a little in embarrassment.

"No, they are actually really good at keeping secrets," Asha's skeptical tone made me turn to face.

"But then you already know that they are planning for your birthday," my eyebrows came together upon my frown.

"Oh," understanding dawned over Asha's face before she cleared her throat and looked at me seriously, "Rynah, now that you are a part of the family, you need to know something. The party that is going to be held soon is the party in the honor of my late sister, Aradhana, Viaan's biological mother, and

my husband's first wife."

I sat up straighter, wide-eyed. The shock had zapped through my entire being, left me numb and zapped again to make me feel all sorts of emotions, "What?"

Disbelief was clear in my tone, as well on my features.

"Yes, my husband was married to Aradhana before marrying me. I was carrying Aaryan when he brought me to India. At that time Vikrant was only five years old, and the twins were four. What I wasn't expecting was my husband lying to two women at the same time just to break their trust, their faith in marriage and their meaning of life. Viaan had just turning seven back then and it was a bigger blow to Aradhana and him but she kept all the hard feelings at bay and took care of me like my own sister when I needed it, when my final trimesters were a nightmare, even when I had snapped at her and my husband for giving me such a big shock, for his betrayal I had avoided her. I don't think I would have had the strength to do what she did for me and I realized how great of a soul she was right then."

She had paused, lost in distant memories that came out of her mouth. It was shocking to hear her reveal something like that, I was completely speechless.

"And that was the time, I thought calmly. She was a victim of it just like me, yet she had no grudge towards me. I let her in, and that was one of the best decisions I had made. We understood each other, empathized with each other, and realized what had to be done to save our children's future. She died in an accident, trying to save us and Viaan was right there when it happened. Since then, Viaan has taken care of us. Though I haven't given birth to Viaan, he is my son in every aspect and I'm his mother. He never differentiated between me and his birth mother. And he will always be my first son."

She blinked, coming back to the present and looked at me. I had been utterly speechless as I realized why everyone said he had trust issues. I realized why

he behaved coldly because he had witnessed his father's betrayal and his mother's death at such a tender age. My heart ached for him. He wasn't what I had thought him to be. All of a sudden, I felt guilty and wrong for judging him without knowing anything about him. And wondered if he looked like his mother.

"Was she beautiful?" I asked out of blue. Asha understood what I meant as she replied getting up and walking towards the table, "Very beautiful. Big doe eyes, radiant smile, golden skin, thick and long voluminous hair, sharp nose and high cheekbones. She was tall and slim. A real Indian Beauty. She was so wise and brilliant, even without formal English education. She was the daughter of the chieftain and she truly was a female alpha. Nobody could distinguish between us in the mannerisms even when I had been born and brought up in Europe. She was that dignified and poised."

My eyebrows shot up to touch my hairline listening to the tales about my late mother-in-law. She smiled as she picked up a photo frame on the table and walked back to me before passing it.

My jaw hit the ground looking at the picture in the frame. There, clad in golden Ghaghara was a beautiful lady looking like an angel dropped from heaven. It was true, Viaan got his good looks from his mother. She could easily be compared to Asha's beauty. And the realization of such a beautiful soul not being among us ached even more.

He must miss her so much.

"Mrs. Raivardhan, Mr. Pablo is here to see you regarding the accident that occurred with the waiter at Charm," a maid from the door called out, making Asha and me exchange glances.

"I'll go and meet him," she announced before going out and I resumed looking at Aradhana's picture. She sounded like an amazing person. And suddenly I realized that I had to research about salsa and be ready by eight.

Otherwise my Drill Sargent was going to chew me alive!

31. EKTEES

Nodding at the last few seconds of

the video tutorials of the basics of salsa, I made a note of the instructions taught by a much better teacher than my current tutor...

The video ended, displaying the replay button. After having watched the same video multiple times, I opted to switch the smart television off before exiting the gym. To be honest, I had hardly spent more than fifteen minutes learning the basics, skipping all the parts where he repeated the same thing again and again.

What? I'm a fast learner! Or at least I like to think so.

Ambling down the hall, I halted when I heard an unfamiliar voice, "Mind that attitude, Mrs. Raivardhan! I'm a government official, who doesn't stick his tongue out upon the sight of the crisp notes with Gandhi on it. I will be making sure that your sons shall see what it's like to spend time in prison. What happens when they take law in their hands? Only one slip, only one evidence and it shall all be true." The last few sentences were hissed angrily with a promise.

My heart sank as fear washed over me. Fear for the Raivardhan brothers that had become a part of my family.

"I would love to see you try. It's a free country after all. You may leave now, I don't have an entire day to spend cheerily chatting with you," the calmness and hints of arrogance in Asha's voice took me by surprise. I had never thought of hearing something like that from Asha. Right at that moment, she did resemble the Mother of Raivardhans.

"This isn't over, yet," another hissed promise from the man and the loud footsteps echoed as he stomped his way towards the door, that was ajar, like a sulking kid. By the time I could decide whether to hide or stand my ground, the door swung open revealing a man in his mid-forties. He came up to my height and while comparing his build with my husband's, I didn't need to tell that my husband was a clear winner.

With a grimace, he regarded me with an annoyed look before stomping out the rest of his way.

I watched him till he got behind the glass doors of the elevator followed by one of the male servants who was waiting at the end of the corridor.

"Be careful of Mr. Pablo. He's a rotten soul that survives on greed," I heard Asha's voice from beside making me turn to look at her. She watched Mr. Pablo's frame disappear below the ground before continuing, "And when it's not satisfied, he gets down to dirty business. Nothing that we haven't dealt with before. Nothing we can't deal with in the future, to worry about."

She had confidence in her sons. And living with them I had started to understand why. They were capable of anything and everything. They could take down the country individually, let alone working as a team with tight bonds and understanding.

Blinking out of her thoughts, she looked at me, "I suppose you are yet to have breakfast?"

"Yes, quite famished after the practice," I rubbed my stomach, feeling it

growl softly. She smiled tenderly making me want to disbelieve the change in her attitude she had before Mr. Pablo. She looked like a gentle soul but now I knew what she could be if she wanted.

"And after that, I was thinking of visiting my cousin, if you permit me," I said as we walked towards the elevator.

"You are not an employee or a maid of this house, Rynah. You can do whatever you wish unless it's an emergency or for safety purposes. We are a family, you don't need to ask for permission. But I am happy to be informed about where you are going. Just informing one of us is very much enough," she smiled at me, making me grin widely.

I seriously loved her.

"Stop here, I'll walk the rest of the way," I instructed the chauffeur, making him park the car by the curb. The traffic was terrific on this route and another reason that I opted to walk was that I didn't want to attract a lot of attention by riding in an expensive car. My in-laws didn't have an economic car, something that wouldn't make heads turn. The last thing I wanted was to be stared at by people while trying to enjoy my coffee with Anjali. She had called in the morning wanting to talk about something important and it worried me when her voice sounded strained.

I was a few blocks away from the cafe where we had agreed to meet. I hoped she was alright. Lost deep in my thoughts, I entered another alley for a shortcut to reach the place but it was something that I regretted when I realized that I had entered a road filled with isolated warehouses which was instead infested with beggars, drunkards, and druggies sitting on every other corner.

The look they greeted me with made chills run down my spine. The hair on

my neck stood up when I registered that a few of the smokers had started to follow me. I regretted leaving the chauffeur and car behind...

Without any other thought, I took off running when my gut instinct told me. And as expected, they started to chase after me. I threw my purse away in the hopes that they were after the money and would stop once they got it. But no! They continued to chase me down for whatever reason they had!

Stupid stupid Rynah!!! Your stupidity will surely get you killed today! Did you seriously have to care about your status and leave the comforts of the car behind for this?

Trying to lose the guys, I took a left and ran towards the main road. To my luck, there weren't many people in the line of sight. And the ones in sight were still quite far away to aid me. My eyes automatically zoomed on one guy who stood by his car talking over the phone with his back towards me. And as if he was a magnet and I was made up of iron, I ran towards him.

"Help!" I screamed out trying to grab his attention, he turned to look at me. That was it, even in this situation, I ended up losing my breath looking at him. He was lean and tall and so handsome to see with a dimple in his chin. And the best part was he was in a suit indicating that he was a businessman who might be aware of Viaan. That way I could reach out to Viaan for help.

As the stranger quickly analyzed the situation, he immediately opened the door of the passenger seat and ran towards the driver side before climbing in. I didn't think twice before climbing into the passenger seat while he ignited the engine and drove it in reverse. I pulled the door closed when he took the turn and started to calm my ragged breathing.

"Thanks," I croaked between my breaths.

"Mention not," he replied in a deep voice. The shades on his eyes hid half of his face. I examined the rest of his features. He had a longer face with a sharp

jawline. Clean shaved and bouncy hair. He mustn't be much older than me. Perhaps even younger than me. The defined male features were prominent indicating he might be very popular among his female friends.

"Why were you chased like that?" He asked rounding around the corner.

"I don't know, they randomly started to follow me when I passed by them in the alley. Maybe it's because of my husband..." I mumbled the last part to myself.

"What do you mean?" He asked, glancing over me briefly.

"Viaan Raivardhan, heard about him?" I asked hopefully.

"Oh yes! You are his wife, aren't you? I've seen the news but didn't recognize you from the pictures," he exclaimed looking at the road.

"Yes, sorry for not meeting your expectations in reality," I gave him a tight-lipped smile.

"I didn't mean it in a bad way, what I meant was you are even better looking in person," he turned around another corner entering the main road.

"Where to?" He asked, joining the already clearing traffic.

"Cuppa ahead. That would be my stop," I pointed at the diminished board of the cafe that was getting more and more clearer as we neared it. He stopped by pulling to the curd and looked over at me.

"Thanks once again, I don't know what would have happened if you weren't there at that time," I took my time thanking for his help when he didn't even know who I was.

He cast a lopsided smile replying, "You're most welcome."

I grinned back before extending my hand for a handshake, "I'm Rynah Raivardhan by the way."

He studied me and my extended hand for a second, contemplating about something before finally deciding to shake it, "Shaurya. Shaurya Vardhan."

His big, rough hand gave me a firm handshake before letting it go.

"Be careful out there, there are a lot of people you need to be wary of," his words gave me chills but I shook it off before smiling at him and replied, "I will be. Until next time then, Shaurya!"

"Until the next time," he nodded curtly before driving away after I got down. Breathing a sigh of relief, I turned around and entered the cafe. I wasn't going to tell Anjali about what had happened with me, stressing her more than she already was. I may talk about it with one of my in-laws, 'may' being the keyword...

Walking into the sitting area, I spotted Anjali sitting in a corner, against a wall. She had a lost look on her face while she swirled her cold coffee with her straw. The drink was untouched for sure. She looked up only when I pulled the chair beside her to sit down.

"Rynah," she blinked, coming back to present before hugging me as a greeting.

"Anju, you look so lost. What happened?" I asked, hugging her back. She withdrew and started to fidget with her fingers.

"He came back," she looked down as she said it, like a timid little squirrel.

"Raj?" I frowned, searching for any other clue that could hint about what was going on with her. She nodded still not meeting my eyes before continuing, "He... Raj has been calling me and pleading to meet him once. When I didn't

return it, he dropped by the college and dragged me to a corner. He kept apologizing for everything. For judging you, for hurting me and everything."

"He did?" I asked, trying to predict her next words.

She nodded again.

"So what's the problem?"

"I'm still not quite sure if my anger has subdued or not. He had spoken bad about you! How could I forgive him so easily?" She scowled at my face.

I couldn't help but let a big smile slip making her scowl deepen, "You still love him enough to think about him."

It wasn't a question and she knew that. She opened her mouth to counter it but I stopped her, "Don't think too much about it, Anjali. Love tests all your boundaries and forgetting and forgiving the past is a crucial part of every relationship. Give him a chance, he will make it up to you if he really regrets it."

"You sure?" She frowned at her hands, still fidgeting with each other. I slightly squeezed her hands encouragingly and blinked in affirmation when she looked into them, "Very much."

Finally, a smile started to make an appearance on her face, making me cheer her up, "That's the spirit!"

We chatted about random things for another hour or two before she offered to pay when I told her I 'lost' my purse on the way. It made me feel guilty. Promising her to pay her back, we left the cafe when I found my chauffeur waiting for me outside. I dragged Anjali along with me since she lived a road away from my new house.

By the time we reached our homes, Anjali was her old jovial, sarcastic and darling self again. After dropping her at her house and spending a little time with Aunt Lasika, I headed back to my house.

I hadn't even got into the elevator when I heard his voice, "Where the hell had you been? And why didn't you pick the calls?"

I shivered at the authority in his voice as I turned around to face Viaan who looked quite pissed at the moment, with his hands folded across his chest

"I-I was with Anjali, I had informed mom before going out today," I explained as firmly as I could when my heart thundered continuously in my chest. I could feel the butterflies in my stomach at his sight. After what Asha had told about their history, I understood one thing for sure, I was seeing Viaan in another light.

"What happened to your phone?" He asked, dropping his hands just to put them in the pockets as he came to stand before me.

"I lost my purse," I murmured as I decided against saying what had happened. He was already pissed, I didn't want to hear him scold me ruining the rest of the night for me.

"What?" His eyebrows furrowed as he stared into my eyes.

"I lost my purse somewhere," I spoke louder this time hoping to sound more firm and clear.

He just regarded me with narrowed eyes before asking, "Really?"

I couldn't help but gulp to swallow the suddenly formed knot in my throat before I nodded. I was sweating visibly, only praying he wouldn't press the matter further while he scrutinized my expressions and actions.

"Vikrant is waiting for the practice. Freshen up and go," he walked towards the elevator leaving me staring at the space in shock, tangibly gaping. Did Viaan just leave the topic alone? Like really alone? Did he buy it? Like holy cow's crap!

"You coming?" His voice broke me out of my shock, making me turn around and rush into the elevator. I didn't meet his eyes nor looked towards him as I pretended that a white concrete wall behind the glass was much more interesting than him. And as soon as the elevator dinged and opened the doors, I rushed out towards our room.

"Yes, Mr. Jeshie. What did you want to discuss," Vikrant walked out talking over his phone as he left me alone to practice the basic salsa steps. For not being one with a lot of dancing knowledge, I did pretty well I guess. Some jazz music was booming through the stereo.

"One, two, three, pause. One, two, three, pause," I kept chanting to myself as I moved around practicing the steps. I turned only to leap startled and come to a stop. My heart had jumped to a stop before beating again making my breaths ragged. There, just a few steps from the door stood Viaan with a slightly tilted head and an arrogant smirk.

"What?" I asked out in a hoarse voice feeling self-conscious.

"At that rate, you will surely dig a hole in the ground," he sauntered his way towards me while looking at the ground.

Just to stand before me, he stated, "Thank goodness! Nothing happened to the floor yet."

"What the hell!" I exclaimed, making him look up into my eyes. His smirk spread even wider, irritating the hell out of me. He may have trust issues and

a hard past but he still was a jerk of an asshole.

"You say it like you know how to dance," I challenged him, raising my chin with the air arrogantly.

"Better than you do." He sure was enjoying this, I could tell. I gestured with my hand for him to prove it and what he did just took my breath away. In a quick movement, he caught my waist with both of his hands and pulled me closer.

Being chest to chest with him, while his hands were on my waist made butterflies soar and not flutter in my stomach. My blank head left me speechless, even though we had been this close before. But at that time, I had a different opinion of him. He was just a cold, arrogant, spoiled brat that grew up into a man who got away with anything he did for me back then.

But now, I knew another layer behind that hard handsome exterior he wore.

"Move your foot with the steps and be gentle this time. This is not tap dance but salsa," he instructed moving his foot back making me move my step front. But due to my shock and lack of proper processing, I ended up moving the wrong foot and stamping his feet. He closed eyes and clenched his jaws making me step back in panic, "I'm so sorry! Are you alright?"

He hadn't moved his hands off my body while grumbling, "Fine."

He opened his eyes and moved forward reducing the space between us again as he instructed, "relax your muscles, you are too tense. Move to the rhythm, let my body guide you."

Shivers went down my spine when he told me that. I recognized the song that had started, *Bilionera* by Otilia.

I didn't understand the foreign language part that it had. As if understanding

my question, Viaan answered, "it's Spanish."

My lips turned into an 'o' as I continued to listen to the song. I didn't realize I had been staring into his eyes the whole time. Staring into the molten chocolate swirl in his iris, I continued to mindlessly practice the steps as questions started to form in my head.

"What is it?" He asked.

I contemplated whether to ask or not. Watching me hesitate, he encouraged me, "I'll answer whatever you ask."

I looked at him trying to see if he was lying. But Viaan hadn't ever lied to me before. So gathering my courage, I spoke, "I heard about your mother. I'm so sorry about what you all had to go through."

His hands stiffened on either side of me but he didn't stop nor spoke. Taking that as a slightly positive reaction, I continued, "She was really beautiful. You have her eyes."

"I get that a lot." His voice was slightly off but nothing that indicated that he was angry.

"I've seen everyone. Everyone except one person, where is your father? What is he like?" Viaan stopped and removed his hands at my question, making my heart drop. His eyes had gone cold and so did his expression. Looking at his expression, I had concluded that he wasn't going to answer that and my shoulders slumped in defeat.

But when he replied, it took me by surprise, "He is dead. We don't talk about him."

Telling that he turned around to leave the gym but I called out again hopefully, making him halt with his back facing toward me, "can you help me

practice salsa? Vikrant feels more of a commander than a teacher."

We stood in awkward silence until he decided to turn around to face me. He looked his unapproachable self again like he had cut everything and everyone out.

"Answer me honestly," his voice sounded colder yet it didn't seize my heart but his next words did, "Did you really lose your purse?"

32. BATTEES

I just ended up staring into his eyes as drop by drop sweat trickled down my spine. A knot of nothing formed in my throat making me involuntarily trying to swallow it down. And all the while Viaan kept his narrowed eyes trained on me like a sword hanging over my head. The jazz music in the background wasn't helping at all.

"Well?" He exhaled loudly and crossed his hands across his chest after another five minutes of not getting any answer from my side.

"You are angry," I meekly pointed trying to calm down my thundering heart.

"No, I am not angry but I'm annoyed and losing my patience," he countered as he stepped forward intimidatingly.

Unintentionally, I took a step back, "You won't scold or take some extreme action, right?"

"Is there a need to?" He tilted his head slightly like a predator cornering his prey that he was only playing with. I shook my head rapidly, scared for no particular reason. Or perhaps with the thought that he would bring up my clumsiness or how much of a trouble magnet I was or that I don't value his hard-earned money and I had tried to lie to him...

That was it! I wasn't telling him! I was so not telling him! If I stick to the same lie, it would be eventually accepted as the truth, wouldn't it?

"I really lost it," I took another step back, scared that he would grab the truth out of me. I felt like the child trying to escape the inevitable punishment from the parent by acting innocent when both of us knew that I wasn't.

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows in mock disbelief, taunting me as he took another step forward. The way he acted felt like he knew everything, scaring me, even more, when it wasn't even my fault! If he knew it already, I was dead for sure.

"This is the last chance I'm giving you, tell the truth Rynah. Or I know other ways to get the truth," he openly threatened me! He was threatening his own damn wife!

Knowing what he was capable of and how sure he was that I was lying to him had me panic-stricken, especially when he pulled his phone out.

"Okay! Okay! I will tell you the truth!" I raised my hands in surrender as I tried to calm him down like how we try to calm down a wary and wounded animal, though he wasn't either of those. He stared at me, waiting for me to continue.

"I... I threw it," I mumbled under my breath, making him frown, "What?"

"I threw it!" I yelled, feeling agitated.

"Why?"

"I was being chased by some delinquents when I went to visit Anjali this afternoon. So, I thought that they were after the money and threw it away to stop them from running after me," I explained looking at the ground. I didn't want to look at his face, not at all after it ended into an awkward silence

between us. If I excluded the not so soothing background music.

"Why in the hell did you not tell me this before, Rynah?" His voice boomed through the air like a tiger's roar resulting in me flinching. I looked up to find him covering the distance between us with quick long strides before I could get over my panic, he was already in front of me.

I was so dead.

"I'm sorry, but trust me there wasn't much cash in there nor was the phone very expensive. Just get the number blocked—" Viaan cut my blabbering off by grabbing hold of my shoulder and gave me a rough shake.

"Are you crazy? No matter how much cash was in there it doesn't matter more than your life! You stupid woman! You had your life at stake and you don't tell me because you are worried about some measly dirt on your hand?" he straight away yelled at my face leaving me more shocked as every minute passed by.

"I... I... I..." I was a stuttering mess perhaps I could even try my luck at rapping after this.

"I, what? How are you going to explain this?" Oh boy, he sure was angry...

"You... You are angry," I pointed out.

"No geez, Sherlock. I ain't angry," he deadpanned as he pulled me closer, scaring me more just to continue, "I am furious."

"I... I was scared," I swear I didn't want to cry but seeing him this angry waterworks started on their own. As if I had flipped a switch in Viaan, his expression softened a bit, so did his tight grip over my upper arms.

"I was scared that you would be angry," on hearing me confess my reason to

hide it, he let go of me as he turned and ran his hand through his hair in frustration.

I could hear him exhale loudly before he closed his eyes and pressed the bridge of his nose before opening them again.

"From tomorrow onwards, two bodyguards shall always be with you whenever you go out, with whichever family member you go out with. And the third guard will be your driver who shall make sure that you will always and only get down at the destination and nowhere in between, whenever you travel alone. You will not travel in any other vehicle, not leave the house without informing me, not go out without your bodyguards. Don't even try to sneak out because the watchmen will be informed about it," he turned around to leave the room again leaving me gaping wide.

"But that's not fair!" I protested quickly, recovering after he took a step towards the door.

He halted to turn his head to a side as he added, "And no more arguments. My decision isn't going to change. No matter how much you try." And then he resumed his walking again.

I didn't know what to feel. Whether I should be saddened by the fact that my freedom had borders or be happy to witness how much Viaan cared about me to go to this extent or be mad at him for overreacting. It wasn't like they had caught me, I could take care of myself and I had. Though I had some outside help. Nevertheless, I was alright, standing right here!

He paused at the door before looking over his shoulder, "And yes, you can call me when you practice dancing." With that, he was already out. Letting a whole damn zoo free in my stomach...

"How's he doing?" Asha asked as soon as Daksh walked into the dining room. There wasn't any need to ask about whom she was talking about. It was the waiter who had been fatally injured. It had just been me and Asha who were having our lunch when Daksh decided to join us.

"Still in a coma," he slumped on the chair and started to gulp a glass of water that was placed before him.

"And that Rathore guy who is responsible for his condition?" I asked out of curiosity.

"He lost his job, now he is indebted and losing the case really badly," he answered as he placed the glass down and lifted the nearest bowl of salad as he started filling his plate before he added, "It won't be long till he will be rotting in the prison for what he had done. Neel will make sure that he does."

For the first time, I got a chill by hearing what Neel was capable of. He was one of the sweetest guys I had ever met. And never seen any other side of him that had given me a hard time believing that he was the one who was calling shots this time.

"And yeah," Daksh looked up as he lifted a chicken popcorn dipped in ketchup and continued, "Viaan wants you to be ready by six in the evening. Another one of those inevitable events has popped up."

I groaned loudly. I hated these events, they troubled more than their worth.

I climbed into the passenger seat when Viaan stopped his black Mercedes Benz in the basement. The slit of my shimmering black gown opened to reveal the contrastingly white skin of my leg from the thigh to all the way down. I didn't even care to cover it up, feeling very tired already.

"Isn't that slit a little too up?" Viaan scowled at the windshield.

"Well, hello to you too my dear husband," I smiled sarcastically. I was pissed enough that it appeared on my features.

"I don't like that dress at all," he gritted out as he started to drive out of the house.

I looked down to see what was wrong with the dress. It was a V-neck full-sleeved dress with a side-slit. Nothing very revealing except for the slit and he had a problem with this. *Amazing...*

I rolled my eyes and looked at the rear-view mirror to find an SUV following suit.

"Are those my bodyguards?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes."

I turned around to face him, pulling over my best puppy face, I started pleading with him, "Viaan please, Viaan. Please send them back for tonight. I don't want black-suited people following me everywhere around."

He didn't reply and just continued to drive. To grab his attention, I placed my hands on his arm and tried again, "Viaan, please! I will do as you say tonight and behave! And you will be right there, so there is no need for extra guards. Please, Viaan."

He glanced my way, "You will behave yourself and follow my orders?"

"Yes!" Viaan was considering it! I couldn't control my excitement.

"And you won't attack me like you did the last time?" My cheeks burned at his words. I shook my head furiously.

"I won't do it again. And I am very sorry about that, it wasn't one of my brightest moments," I said. It surely was an unbelievable feat that I had pulled.

Viaan hummed softly before pressing a button on the stereo making a dialing tone boom from the speakers.

"Hello, sir?" A rough voice answered.

"Aashish, you guys go back and take the night off," he ordered.

"Okay sir, as you say," the call ended leaving both of us in silence before I broke it by squealing out of joy and hugged Viaan, taking him by surprise, "Thank you, thank you, thank you so so much!"

I sat back in my chair grinning like a five-year-old.

"You are so easy to please," his voice made me look at him, who was smiling softly.

"I can't help it, I was born this way," I shrugged, still grinning like a fool. The rest of the drive went in comfortable silence. A remarkable crowd had assembled. People posed for the paparazzi. Viaan got down, handing keys to the valet, he came to open my door.

I looked at him, who was suited in a light blue double-breasted suit and his classic white shirt, with his hand held out for me to take. My heart skipped a beat at how handsome he looked in twilight sky. A shy smile crept on my lips as I placed my hand in his awaiting one and climbed out of the car.

We were soaked in flashes. Facing the cameras, we posed as Viaan placed his hand on the small of my back. The smile on my face wouldn't budge. I waved at the camera when Viaan gently pulled me towards the entrance, where he showed the invite to the doorman who greeted us before letting us

in. The corridor was traditionally designed with a red carpet, crystal chandeliers, and golden lights. Viaan led me towards the humongous double doors that were kept open.

Once inside, I witnessed what Victorian balls might have been like. Some people were waltzing to the slow music in the middle of the room. And others were chatting around the place. Tables had been set all over the room with nameplates for each chair placed around the table.

"Good evening, Mr. Raivardhan," I heard a polite feminine voice greet professionally. My head turned towards the source to find a small framed girl in a conservative dress, hair plaited and round-rimmed glasses sitting on the bridge of her nose.

"Ah, Natasha. Did you get the papers?" Viaan asked receiving a curt nod before she opened the folder she was carrying and retrieved a set of stapled sheets.

Oh, I remember her! She was at my wedding too! It looks like she did get the job. She must have been really smart if she could make Viaan give her a job. And to my relief she was very professional and all business. They both started talking about all the dull and boring work, leaving me to survey the big room.

The one thing that I didn't expect was seeing *him*. I blinked my eyes several times to check if I was actually seeing it or not.

Just a few feet from me, standing in an expensive blue tuxedo with his hair waxed back was none other than Raj, *Anjali's Raj!*

For a second I hadn't recognized him but then Anjali had shown me the pictures just the other day. And informed me that they had decided to start over again this morning.

A question had started to itch my mind, *'wasn't Raj just a marriage broker for whom Anjali had hopelessly fallen for?'*

It looked like a different story altogether here.

33. TAINTEES

I stared at Raj or whoever this person was trying to understand what was going on. I was aware of the frown that had etched on my features like a warning sign *'Disturb her and you are dead!'*. My hands had automatically dialed a familiar number even before I could comprehend. Viaan had got me another phone this morning and I so was glad that he had.

The vibration of the dialing tone on the other side made me realize that it was my sister's life that was at stake here which I definitely was not going to allow Raj to gamble with.

There was a longer vibration before Anjali's faint *"hello"* reached my ear, snapping me out of my thoughts. Quickly pulling my thoughts together, I carefully constructed my sentences. I didn't want her to feel more anxious than she already was. I wanted her to be happy with the guy she loved but not

the guy who was lying to her face.

"Hey Anju!" My eyes never left the impostor named Raj, following every movement of his.

"Oh, Rynah! What's up?" Anjali's voice held joy while I tried to keep the worry out of mine.

"Nothing much, dear. I just wanted to know the full name of your guy," I watched her *so-called* guy toasting a glass of champagne to two other ladies in the group.

"Raj Agnihotri. Why what happened? Is something wrong?" She picked something up from my question.

Stupid Rynah! Couldn't you have been more careful with that question?

I mustered a fake smile as I replied sweetly, "Nope! Nothing's wrong. It was just Viaan and I were having a chat and I ended up mentioning about you guys by mistake. And he asked for the guy's which I wasn't able to deliver. So, I called you."

I just hoped that my justification was logical, I didn't want to make another blunder after the previous one.

"Oh, alright. Are you still with my brother-in-law?" Anjali questioned making me glance at Viaan who was still holding the file and looked occupied with it, though Natasha was nowhere in sight.

"Yeah... He's standing right beside me," I answered as my eyes automatically landed back on Raj Agnihotri.

"Alright, then I'll talk to you later when you aren't busy," Anjali's voice reached my ear, making me nod once before I realized that I was on phone.

"Sure," I hit the end button and looked at the person I was going to hunt down tonight. Raj Agnihotri.

"You better tell me what I had *supposedly* asked you to find out about Anjali's guy," the deep voice of Viaan's, startled me in my place. He was still flipping through his file making me almost exclaim, the keyword being 'almost', "What the hell!?! I thought that you were preoccupied with that stupid file and hadn't heard a word that I said to Anjali!"

"I am occupied with the file but it's the Raivardhan habit of multitasking," he closed the file and looked at me with that piercing gaze of his, "now tell me what is this all about?"

"That's what I want to find out," I cast my gaze at Raj to find him walk away with other girls towards the door guarded by a bouncer. Now how in the hell was I going to follow him in there?

My eyes then landed on my husband who tilted his head as he regarded me with a cool look while he waited for my answer.

"Why don't we go for a walk inside there and I'll tell you everything?" I nodded towards the door behind which Raj had disappeared, making Viaan follow my gaze to watch the bouncer.

"That is why I need to find out who this really guy is," I finished explaining Viaan as I looked around the high-end bar. The blue lightning around the area gave it a SciFi touch.

"Who is the guy?" Viaan exhaled loudly, folding his arms across his chest.

I looked around for another time and found the person I had been searching for.

"There! That guy in the blue tuxedo. With those two ladies and two oldies," I discreetly tried to point at the table about four tables away from us. Viaan looked at him and observed the people.

I wished I could approach Raj and confront him. And as if my wish was coming true, Raj got up and walked towards the bartender who was pouring the blue colored liquid into the pyramid of glasses. I immediately got up to follow him but instead of me going after him, I felt a hand snake around my waist before dragging me in the other direction.

My head whipped up to find Viaan pulling me away to elsewhere.

"What are you doing, Viaan? I need to talk to him," I tried to free myself from his hold but Viaan being Viaan, didn't let go of me. He just whispered above my ear, "just trust me."

And before I could even comprehend, we were standing before the table where Raj's companions had been seated. All of them looked up at our arrival and the two oldies stood up in greeting, "My goodness! Hello, Mr. Raivardhan! What a pleasant surprise!" The man in his late fifties with salt and pepper hair and decent suit welcomed, shaking Viaan's hand. Okay, maybe I was getting what game Viaan was playing here.

"Nice to meet you again, Mr. Agnihotri. Meet my wife, Rynah," Viaan gestured towards me, causing me to reflexively shake Mr. Agnihotri's hand mumbling a 'hello'.

"This is my younger brother, Kamal and my daughter, Mona. And that's my niece, Kajal," Mr. Agnihotri introduced the other people around the table. Now that their surnames were out, wasn't Agnihotri the same surname Raj had?

"Please do join us," Kamal Agnihotri moved away to let us in. I looked at Viaan for the next step and when he gestured towards the sofa, I moved in

and sat next to Mr. Agnihotri's daughter Mona while giving both the ladies a polite smile.

"What are you doing here?" Viaan casually asked, making Mr. Agnihotri laugh.

"These girls here wanted to see what a bar looked like and somehow managed to convince their brother to bring them here, without our knowledge. And you can't fool a father, we followed them. Since the atmosphere is not worrisome, we decided to let them stay for some time with us," Kamal Agnihotri explained.

"Your son?" Viaan asked the question I had been wanting to ask to get Raj into picture for the next step.

"Yes my son, oh here he comes," Mr. Agnihotri said, looking behind us. I wanted to turn and verify if it was Raj who was coming but then another thought occurred to me. If I didn't want to give any time for Raj to create any story, I had to surprise him. Trap him from where he couldn't escape.

Neither I nor Viaan turned to look at Raj. Instead, we sat still, waiting for him to come before us.

"Dad, who's this?" A man's voice reached my ears before *Raj* came into view. And when he did look at us, his face was worth watching.

Mr. Agnihotri introduced us to him but Raj remained frozen at his spot, "and this is my son, Aviraj."

"Nice to finally meet you Mr. Avi-Raj," Viaan smirked while he stressed at '*Raj*'. Involuntarily Aviraj gulped. It was a subtle movement but I noticed it and I was sure that Viaan too had.

Placing my hand over Viaan's chest, I spoke in a sweet voice, "Darling, I am

thirsty. I will get myself a drink."

Viaan smirked as he nodded, understanding what I was doing. I got up giving a pointed look at Aviraj before walking away from the table, towards the counter. I didn't even need to turn back to look if Aviraj was following me or not, because I had started to learn to do things like a pro. The way Raivardhans worked. The way Viaan worked.

I stood by the counter and felt someone come to stand beside me. A half-smirk formed on my lips while at the same time my blood boiled within. Viaan was surely rubbing off on me.

"You lied to my sister," I entwined my fingers together and stared in front of me.

"Mrs. Raivardhan, please listen to me before you conclude anything," Aviraj pleaded. I looked at him.

He seemed desperate and nervous as he waited for my decision. His expression reminded me of a fourth-grade kid attending his first-ever oral exam before a stringent teacher.

I just kept looking at him with a poker face. He took that as a sign and continued, "I am sorry that I misunderstood you and I am sorry that I lied to Anjali. But trust me, I love her a lot. Ravi is a very close friend of mine. He has always taken me along with him to look for suitable ladies for marriage. To not attract much attention towards myself, I have asked them to introduce me as the broker. And since my family's company is one of the best matchmaking ones, it was a good excuse too. Even when he came to see you, that was why I was there with him."

He paused there to take a breath before he continued, "What I didn't expect was to end up getting whipped at first sight. One glance at Anjali and I was sure that I was doomed for good," Aviraj smiled to himself remembering his

memories.

"At first it was the mere attraction. I followed her thinking that sometimes with her would cure me of my obsession with her. So, I lied to her about my name. Not entirely though as you know, it was just to not wanting her to follow me after I disappeared from her life like any other girl that I had dated before had. But as I ended up getting to know her better, I fell more and more for her. And the things Ravi told me about you being promiscuous, made me angry towards you.

"That led to a few complications between me and Anjali. She would always defend you while I believed in Ravi's words. We decided to separate our paths. But then I realized that if you really were that kind of girl, then Mr. Raivardhan wouldn't have married you. That was when I realized that I had made a mistake. It had been difficult to spend every minute without Anjali, so I swallowed my pride and approached her again, asking for her forgiveness and a second chance. I was going to tell her the entire truth about me not being a broker but the son of the owner of the matchmaking company but Anjali has requested some time to think it through. And I had to wait."

His words were making sense. And I was sure that he couldn't have made this entire thing up in a matter of a few minutes.

"I beg of you, Mrs. Raivardhan, please don't say anything yet to Anjali. I want to reveal it to her myself. I want to be the one to explain everything to her," Aviraj joined his hands before me as he pleaded. He looked terrified as if I was going to swallow him whole. Guess, he wasn't so bad after all.

"Do you really love her?" I inquired with narrowed eyes to see if he was lying about that part.

"With my life," he didn't look away nor did he blink, indicating that he was telling the truth. I pitied this guy.

"Okay, I won't tell her anything but you will be telling her everything as soon as possible," I conditioned.

"I will, I promise," Aviraj nodded.

"And you will take care of her and never make her cry again," he again agreed to my words with another nod full of promises.

"Else I will cut you into pieces and feed you to my dog," I threatened him even though I didn't have any dog. But if he broke his words, I was going to buy one just to keep mine.

"Sure sure," he gulped in nervousness.

"And one more thing, call me Rynah. I hope we are going to be family soon," I added finally with a little smile.

"I hope so if Anjali gives me another chance." He scratched the back of his neck as a shy smile took over his lips.

"Now let's get back before my husband comes in search of me," I turned around to look at Viaan's back profile which looked as good as always. Aviraj agreed with me as we returned back to the table.

As soon as I arrived, Viaan's eyes met mine asking if the job was done?

I blinked once with a small smile on my lips as I sat beside him and made myself comfortable. Viaan's hand went around my shoulder making me look up at him while he looked down.

"All set for your sister?" He whispered above my ear making me nod.

"Everything is fine now. Thank you so much for your help," I whispered back. I was seriously very touched that he helped me with this matter. It would have been more difficult to do it all by myself if he hadn't stepped in.

"She's my family too. I do owe at least that much to her." And his words, I swear he was going to make me fall for him at this rate, probably I would even become a puddle over here if he continued to be so charming and sweet. All I could do was looked into his eyes and smile genuinely while he smiled back at me.

"Aw... They look so cute together," I heard one of the female Agnihotri's comments in the background snapping us both out of our private little moment.

"It was nice meeting you again and your family this time, Mr. Agnihotri. We'll take your leave now," Viaan got up and I followed suit. One last time the handshakes went around the table and I nodded at Aviraj which he reciprocated.

Soon Viaan and I were out of there. And I told him everything that Aviraj had said.

"So that's what happened," I ended as we walked out of the bar and back into the ballroom.

"I don't understand one thing though," Viaan's voice was low as he continued, "When I held you back at home for three days, no one else knew where you were except my family and you. Not even your family."

Yeah, he did have a point.

"Then how did *this* Ravi know that you were at my home for those three days?" Viaan turned to look at me, making my eyebrows furrow. He was absolutely right. Why hadn't I noticed it before?

When I couldn't have told anyone where I was and Viaan had taken care of not letting anyone track me down, how did Ravi know that I was at the Raivardhan mansion the entire time? It wasn't like he was a magician. Then

how? Something was fishy...

"There's definitely a rat in your house," another voice answered, making both Viaan and me turn and look at the speaker.

My eyebrows hit the hairline when I registered who it was, "Shaurya?"

There he stood like a model on Vogue cover, in a black tuxedo before he reduced the distance between us. Shaurya came to stand before Viaan as he regarded him coolly, both of them were of almost the same height, towering me.

Like a lazy feline, Shaurya turned to look at me with a lopsided smile, "When I said until next time, I didn't expect it to come this soon. Anyway, hello again, Rynah."

34. CHAUNTEES

I stared at him not knowing what to say, especially when I felt Viaan's sharp gaze zero on the side of my face. The brilliant smile that Shaurya flashed at me was hypnotic. He reminded me of the great Gatsby for some reason, his smile looked practiced and fake.

When none of us showed any sign of saying anything, Viaan took it upon himself to get the answers for the questions that were bugging him.

"How do you know each other?" Viaan's eyes oscillated between me and Shaurya before coming back to me as he questioned. Not to forget how his eyes had narrowed at Shaurya, accusingly.

That was bugging him, for sure... My inner voice mused.

I slightly turned towards Viaan and gently yet firmly squeezed his lower arm, pleading him not to make a mess out of things right in front of everyone as I replied with a chuckle, "Remember I told you about a guy who saved me this afternoon? This is him, Shaurya..." I trailed off looking at Shaurya and telepathically asking him to complete his name. Because I either didn't know or didn't remember to say it out loud.

I don't know if telepathy worked or he was a mind reader by the god's grace, Shaurya picked up the clue and spoke, "Shaurya, I am called Shaurya

Vardhan."

Shaurya's hand stretched across the gap between us for a handshake which Viaan scrutinized before giving him a rough one. Instead of being surprised or confused, all Shaurya did was smile. Viaan spoke with straight face and a stern voice like he was just completing the formality, "Thank you for saving my wife. I owe you one."

Shaurya nodded after replying, "It's been my pleasure."

I don't know if my ears were buzzing when I thought I heard Viaan grumble something like '*of course*', but then I chose to ignore it. For some reason, he wasn't behaving like himself today.

First he didn't react like I was expecting him to when he learned the truth about me throwing my purse away. Then he told me openly that he didn't like the dress I wore for the night nor did I ever think that he would listen to me for the first time in my life and send the guards away. Though it was mostly me who was begging him for it, he did listen in the end. And also he helped me learning Aviraj's truth for Anjali's sake and now this cold shoulder he was giving to Shaurya. Not to forget that he had agreed to be my dance partner this afternoon, catching me off guard.

My my, was it only me or was Viaan being sweet towards me? If I ponder about it, he had been doing things like these for a few days now. Like teaching me horse riding, closing the door slowly to not wake me up in the morning when I slept in, asking the cook to save a bowl of corn soup for breakfast because I loved it. At first, I thought that it was Asha but then learned that it had been Viaan, who did it. And then it had become a tradition for him to wait for me to join the table before he started with a meal. Till then he would surf through his mobile or go through some or the other file from the work. And my heart skipped a beat at the way he respected my family and friends and treated them like they were his own.

These were the small things that were not very noticeable but those little things warmed my heart. Even though we got on each other's nerves, he was kind enough to marry me instead of making someone else marry me. Though he never made me feel like he wasn't treating me right, I knew that he left the love of his life for my sake and that made me feel bad. Guilty even. Especially after learning what kind of person he was.

"Rynah?" The familiar deep voice broke me out of my trance making an unintelligent sound of 'huh?' come out of my mouth.

I looked up just to blink at a staring Viaan who raised an eyebrow at me and then at Shaurya who had a ghost of a smirk etched on his lips.

"Are you okay?" Viaan asked skeptically.

"Yes, yes. Of course, why wouldn't I be?" I picked up a flute of some random drink from the tray that the waiter was carrying and gulped it down in one go. The incomplete, undefined taste with the hints of bitterness exploded in my mouth, becoming the reason for my cringe. If it hadn't already gone down, Shaurya surely would have been showered in it by now. Anyway, I still felt like puking my guts out.

"What in the hell was that?" I voiced feeling not so well all of a sudden.

"That, my dear wife, was white wine that you just swallowed like a pro," I swear I heard the amusement in Viaan's voice but my brain had stopped working when the words *white wine* left his mouth.

I couldn't feel my feet below me and my lovely little derriere would have had kissed the ground if it wasn't for Viaan's hand that shot out, sneaking around my waist, supporting my weight.

I didn't know if it was because of the dread that seeped through my entire being at grasping the fact that I had just gulped down a whole glass of white

wine and committed the biggest sin of my life or my lightheadedness that left my head swirl in circles.

"Oh my god... My mom's going to kill me for this! I'm going to hell," I heard myself breathe out in panic before passing out in my husband's arms.

I groaned, feeling my head heavy. The bright lights behind my eyelids made it difficult for me to open them, instead, I shut them tighter as I pulled my hand up to cover my burning eyes.

"Dim the lights," a familiar voice ordered and immediately the bright lights were replaced by the low lights.

I slowly opened my eyes when I felt the bed dip beside me indicating someone sit beside me. Daksh caught my wrist and watched his wristwatch, counting my pulse. At the foot of the bed, Viaan walked back and forth with one hand in his dress pants and another occasionally running through his hair, messing it up. It made him look even hotter than he already did. His coat was discarded on the single sofa.

"Everything looks normal, she must have fainted due to shock," Daksh stood up, announcing loudly.

"God, this woman!" Viaan ran his hand through his hair again. Concern clouded his voice as he looked at me and continued, "I have a wife who fainted after consuming a flute of white wine."

"More like from the dread of consuming a flute of white wine," Daksh remarked, putting his tools back into his briefcase. Amusement was clear in his voice. And then I heard it. The deep chuckles that erupted from Viaan had my attention, "My sentence still sounded better. She fainting for consuming a flute of white wine would sound better than she fainting out of dread of

consuming it. Such a peculiar being she is. I guess Aaryan has named her right. *Craziness.*"

"You have a point, brother. She did prove it on multiple occasions," Daksh sniggered.

"And that *'she'* is still here and listening to you both talk like I wasn't even in the same room!" I snapped, feeling my headache worsen. A scowl marred my face as I glared at the two brothers, earning me another chuckle from them.

Just great! Jerk-heads...

I opted to ignore them as I fetched for an aspirin from the nightstand and dry swallowed it. The brothers started discussing the previous incidents. Apparently, the final hearing for Mr. Rathore's case was announced to be next week, the case that Neel had been prosecuting. The date was set to be two days after the celebration of the birthday of Viaan's mother.

The waiter was still in a coma to his family's despair. I did feel bad for them and was truly glad that my family was helping his family with everything they needed.

A few more days had passed and I was comparatively better at dancing, good enough to get Vikrant's approval. And all the credit went to my patient husband, who endured all the toe stamping, my wrong techniques, slow learning and tight schedule he had to pack himself with due to making time for my dance practice. Before this, I had been proud of being a fast learner but now... Now that I have witnessed Viaan's patience, I was ashamed to admit that in the matter of dance, I was slower than a tortoise.

I saw him less and less as the days passed by, except for the dance session, I rarely saw him at home. Not even when I went late to bed or got up early in the morning.

Even now as I waited for him to appear for the dance practice, I couldn't help but think about his handsome face. It wasn't like I missed it or anything, but a part of me felt lost when he wasn't around.

"Ma'am?" A feminine voice broke me out of my trance as I looked at one of the maids bending towards me.

Apprehending that I was back from my day dreamland, she spoke, "Master Viaan won't be able to come home early today. He has a sudden matter forced into his hands. He had called to inform you first hand but you didn't receive the calls, so he sent the message through me."

My heart sank at the news.

So, I wasn't going to see him today?

My hand automatically reached for my phone that rested on the far end of the table and picked it up. True to her words, there were ten missed calls. Two from Asha and the rest from Viaan.

Asha also happened to be out for sample testing of the food and finalizing the decoration for the day after tomorrow's celebration. She offered me to join her but then I didn't want to miss the last practice session with Viaan. I needed to be good enough at dancing to push off all the other female eagles that were waiting to get their claws on him. Asha seemed to have understood my desperation as she just smiled at me before leaving on her own.

Not to forget, I didn't want three pairs of Tweedledum and Tweedledee to tail us around as either of us had three bodyguards each, now. Thanks to the Raivardhan brothers...

"Thank you, you may leave," I said simultaneously pressing the button and calling Viaan. The maid left the room as she had been instructed leaving me to hear the dial tone on the other end.

He didn't pick it up until the fifth ring, "Hello?"

Involuntarily, I sucked in a breath as his deep voice tingled through my ear.

"Viaan?" Even though I knew it was him, even though I had heard his voice a million times before and could recognize it from anywhere in the world, my mind shut down and let its dumb side take over asking that stupid question.

"That would be me, and you are?" His words made my heart ache. Did he not recognize my voice? Hadn't he saved my number on his phone? All of a sudden my already bad mood turned into worse. That idiotic jerk! Arrogant ass! He was still thinking about Nishika, wasn't he? He didn't realize that it was me?

"Rynah, you there? You okay?" Viaan's worried voice asked when I had failed to answer his previous question.

"Y-yeah..." My voice wobbled due to tears that had formed in my eyes. What was happening to me? Why did this hurt so much, even though I had been through worse before?

Quickly determining not to project my vulnerability, I wiped my tears and took in a deep breath to steady my voice only to end up sniffing a bit.

"Rynah, are you... Are you crying?" Viaan's voice sounded a fusion between confusion and anxiety.

"No... Just something went into my nose," I lied as I continued, "You had called?"

There was silence on the other side of the line as I waited for his answer.

"Viaan?" I called out before checking if I was still connected when it went silent for some time.

Weird, the call was still connected but Viaan wasn't answering.

"Hello, Viaan?" I tried again only to hear the exhalation of breath on the other side.

"Pack your things, we will be leaving for Darjeeling tomorrow at dawn. The party will be the day after tomorrow at the same place."

I didn't reply, just continued to hear his voice.

"I've told two of the maids to help you with packing. That was all I needed to convey. I will be ending the call now."

"And you?" I blabbered it out, even before I could realize.

"Me what?" He asked after a pause.

"I-I meant, your clothes? Should I pack them up for you?"

I heard another sigh or perhaps even a huff from him, making my heart pound faster.

"I have everything I need over there, Rynah. I just wanted to make sure that you didn't miss anything important back home. I need to go now, I'm running late on my schedule."

Whatever hope was bubbling on my face had already been replaced with disappointment. Nevertheless, I replied, "Yeah sure. Bye."

The line died leaving me in silence again...

I sat on the gym floor for some more time, mulling over the thoughts in my head, before finally getting over my sulking and heading back up to my room to pack my stuff. Just as Viaan had informed me, two maids were waiting by the door to help me with the packing.

An hour and a half later, I slumped back on the sofa eyeing the big trolley bag that rested before me. I had packed for both, normal and cold weather. Since Darjeeling was a hill station, it was obvious that the place would be the dead opposite of Hyderabad.

I didn't have to worry about the space for the dress for the event night since my measurements were taken and the dress would be delivered directly at the location. I huff in despondency and loneliness. Everyone was busy in the house, everyone except for me. Aaryan was out for a band meeting, Neel was wrapping up the final protocols of his cases, Daksh was sorting out his responsibilities to other doctors, Asha was still not back home and Viaan and Vikrant were busy with company. And here I was useless, jobless, careless and...

"Witless," I looked up at the door when a masculine voice added the word to the pool of my self critical dictionary.

Aaryan stood beside a black and white, piano keys styled trolley bag.

"When did you get here?" I questioned looking up.

"And heedless too!" Aaryan exclaimed like he just discovered gravity instead of Isaac Newton. He needn't confirm it, I knew that he heard me speaking to myself, which I thought as merely thoughts going inside my head.

"Are you going somewhere?" I asked, trying to change the topic.

"Yes, I'm leaving for Darjeeling now," he looked at his suitcase.

"Now? You aren't coming with us tomorrow?"

"No, I'm going via road with the performers for the event. I also have another job to take care of," Aaryan shrugged.

"Job? What job?" I asked bewildered.

"Nothing important. It's just general stuff and checking things if everything is going alright as planned," Aaryan came towards me before giving me a half hug, "I'll see you at the party, Craziness. Don't let any of the girls get closer to my brother, till I join you guys."

"We will miss you," I returned his half-hug, making him chuckle.

"I'm going only for a day and a half-day, Craziness. But it's okay, I know I'm irresistible to be away from. I can understand your inner desires," there he went all cocky again making me roll my eyes and push him away.

"Yeah, right."

He just laughed as he dramatically fell back towards his trolley.

"Hasta la vista, babe! See you after tomorrow," Aaryan did a two-finger salute before walking out of the room.

Tomorrow, we will be leaving for a place I had never seen before. Except for Delhi and Hyderabad, I hadn't been to any other place. My father had been way too busy with his job and the tightly knit savings of my family didn't give us a privilege of frequent touring opportunities. The relatives in Delhi and our own house in Hyderabad had been our resort for whatever trips we had. And going to a beautiful place like Darjeeling left me bubbling with excitement.

Well, it had been for a few days now but today my mood was ruined by Viaan's absence, all the excitement dulled in me.

Had I only known that everything was going to change after today. For good.

35. PAINTEES

‘Rynah...?’

I heard a distant voice calling for me.

You need to wake up, Rynah...

It felt as if it was asking me to sleep tighter, only with contrasting words. I was half-aware of the things happening around me, like how the sunlight threatened to chase my lovely sleep away and how lazy I was to wake up and draw the curtains in while hoping for some more bonus time for sweet dreams.

"Five more minutes," the vocal cords of my throat pulled together reflexively replying to whoever was trying to wake me up. My neck felt strained and there was a slight burn in my back due to the rigid position. And boy, it felt so hot in here. Upon its own accord, I felt my body turn around, trying to find a more comfortable position.

You are going to fall if you move any further...

The same distant voice warned but it took some time for my malfunctioning brain to function. And it started to work all fine when I felt something hard and cold drop on my back. Or rather I fell on it. And instantly I was wide awake groaning out in pain.

"I did warn you about that," I looked at an amused looking Vikrant by the bedroom door with his hands folded across his chest as he leaned against it.

His lips curled up into a one-sided smirk pissing me off early in the morning.

It took me a few seconds to register that I had fallen asleep on the sofa itself, where I had been waiting patiently for Viaan to come home. Well, I must admit that it was awfully uncomfortable. I felt my neck and backache a lot. And now even my ass after falling, not so elegantly.

"Why didn't you prevent me from falling?" I asked while getting up and rubbing my aching derriere.

"Now, why do you think I would do that rather than enjoy the free entertainment?" Vikrant's half-smirk stretched into a full-blown one making me want to grab him by his ear and make him do some thousand sit-ups apologizing to me. But I knew it then and I knew it now, it would be a miracle for that to happen. Then again, couldn't a girl even dream about it?

Letting go of the matter, I sighed before asking, "Where is Viaan?"

"He's on his way home. He asked me to inform you to be ready," Vikrant was about to leave after saying those words but my frown and my questions that followed suit stopped him involuntarily. Note the letter 's' on the word 'questions'. To Vikrant's great displeasure, the word was plural.

"Wait, wait, wait... He's on his way back home? Did he come home the previous night? Or did he spend the entire night outside? What was he doing there? Why was he not here? Was there someone else along with him? Like another woman? He said he would be home late, but this late? Why is he still out when you are here?"

I stared at Vikrant who stared back at me with a stoic face. I must have looked funny because this fusion of new emotions were all so new to me and currently all over me, visibly...

I was anxious, afraid and jealous all at once and I knew that it showed like an

open book on my face. Was he processing all my questions? Or was he thinking about how, what or which to answer?

"He's here because I sent him ahead to make sure everything goes as planned and to freshen up while making sure you were awake. Since you didn't even bother to pick up the calls," the familiar deep voice of my husband's floated from behind Vikrant.

"You're home," I breathed out in relief while looking at an exhausted Viaan walk into the room and sit on the bed. He was still in the suit that was crinkled and had a few coffee stains. His hair was less than perfect and dark bags appeared underneath his eyes. Yet, he looked as hot as he ever did.

From the corner of my eyes, I watched Vikrant walked out leaving us alone. I, on the other hand, moved towards Viaan who was removing his jacket before loosening his tie.

"You didn't come home last night, right? Where did you sleep?" I picked up the empty glass from the coffee table and filled it with water before offering it to him.

"No, I didn't," was all he answered as he accepted the water and gulped it down in one go.

"Where did you sleep?" I felt my nerves wreck inside of me. He could tell me anything but I hoped that he wouldn't say he slept at Nishika's or even with her...

"I didn't sleep last night. Had to cover so many things in so little time. We were behind schedule, so none of us slept." He got up and headed towards the walk-in closet, relieving me of the fear I was having.

I let out the breath that I didn't even know I was holding while I also felt bad that they had been working so hard. *He* had been working so hard...

By the end of an hour, our luggage was lugged away to be put into the storage compartment of whatever mode of transport we were going to take.

"Yeah Maa, we will be leaving in a while. You sure you guys won't be able to join us?" I asked my mother over a call while brushing my hair with my hands. Viaan had yet to come out of the washroom while I waited for him already dressed in a simple white shirt, denim shorts and a red cap.

Viaan had asked to wear something comfortable and I couldn't get more comfortable than this. It had been my favorite outfit for some time now as I wore it regularly. And by some time I meant before marriage. So Viaan had yet to see my outfit and I had yet to... gauge his reaction.

"Unfortunately, your father is against the idea. He says that we being the girl's parents and shouldn't be intruding into your family matters that often. And I think he's right in this matter," my mom's voice sounded thoughtful, earning a groan from me, "But mom..."

"Now don't whine like a child. You are grown up and even married now. You have already caused my son-in-law enough trouble, we wouldn't want to add to the pile," my mother's words left me gaping before I recovered and narrowed my eyes at no one in particular.

"He complained about me to you guys, didn't he?" Oh, I swear that jerk was just too much.

"Surprisingly, no," her words sounded genuine as she continued, "As a matter of fact, he laughed it out and reassured us that you were a darling there making your father relax. But it was hard for me to digest it. I know my daughter better than anyone."

She chuckled leaving me shocked at her words. Had Viaan truly said that to my parents? Involuntarily, my eyes swept towards the walk-in closet from where Viaan was yet to step out.

"Don't forget to take the sweaters, it will be freezing out there. I've heard that Darjeeling is a pretty cool place. And don't forget to call me as soon as you reach there!"

"I will, I will, mom."

"I almost forgot to tell you! Ritika got accepted into Oxford University! Just this morning the acceptance letter came in. We are so happy at the moment."

The level of my surprise and happiness shot up, "Oh my god! Really? That's amazing news! She had been trying for that for quite some time now! Which course has she chosen? And what is the fee structure? How are we planning to afford her tuition fee and her stay there?" And the worry had started overtaking my mind. Studying abroad could be expensive and considering the financial status of my parents and their self-esteem which didn't allow them to accept money from anyone easily.

"That was our worry initially but then the news of anonymous alumni of the university choosing to be our Ritika's benefactor came through. With the terms of working with the alumni's company later to repay it, of course. It's like she received a full scholarship for her course!"

That was really a splendid news.

"May God bless that son with all the happiness and more success," my mom prayed to make me subconsciously repeat it after her, "Yes, may all his problems go away."

Right then, the door of the walk-in closet opened revealing Viaan in a white round neck full-sleeve t-shirt over ripped jeans. He carried a classic brown leather jacket that he dropped over the bed as he rubbed the towel over his wet hair. My eyes stuck on him where his clothes fit snug to his body perfectly, giving a decent idea about how ripped he was under it whenever he flexed his muscles. My heart skipped multiple times as butterflies tickled in

my stomach.

My mother's voice from the other side of the phone sounded far while my eyes hungrily took in his appearance. Other than the sweats and tank tops, and of course the [sherwani](#) from our wedding, this was the second time I had seen Viaan in something other than suits. The first time being the horse riding day when he was in his denim jacket and tank top under it paired with chinos.

Right now he looked like he had just jumped out of Vogue's cover. Very handsome, very hot. Like a lead singer of a famous band. He looked very much opposite to what he looked in the suits. But never bad or ugly. Just... Quite an *Un-Viaan* type.

"Hello, Rynah? You there?" My mother kept questioning on the other side but my mouth felt so dry.

"I don't like the outfit you are wearing," Viaan mused, placing his towel down and shrugging his jacket on, "Very revealing for the eyes of the outer world. And you might want to close your mouth and answer that call before the person on the other side of the line thinks something might have happened to you."

I blinked coming back to the present, it took me a second to process things through. My mouth felt cold and my mom was still calling out for me, "Rynah? Rynah, can you hear me?"

Viaan pursed his lips to hide his smirk as he headed out of the room.

"Y-yes, mother. There was a little problem with the connection." To say that I wasn't red with embarrassment would be so wrong...

God, why me?

"Helicopter? Did he just say helicopter?" I asked, feeling dumbstruck as I looked at other Raivardhans to confirm it to me.

We were going to die.

That was the first thought that came to my mind. I had seen a lot of news that showed helicopter accidents with no survivors.

"Nope, genius, he said *helicopters*. With an 's' at the end," Vikrant pushed his RayBan over his eyes before getting off the elevator.

Daksh sniggered a little as he and Viaan got out. We were going to the airport in two helicopters that had landed over our terrace. Our freaking own terrace!

My eyes sighted Asha standing beside Vikrant in a white shirt and cream formal pants with a black purse. Vikrant, on the other hand, was in a bluish-purple printed shirt, sleeves folded up to his elbows and beige pants.

Daksh too was in a dark blue colored shirt and white corduroy pants. Neel had yet to arrive. He had been delayed at court but he was here now, just getting ready.

The two metal bodies of the helicopters stood majestically before me. Viaan was talking to whom I presumed to be the pilots while Daksh was busy on a call. Just then the elevator opened with a ding and Neel walked out in a plain navy blue small sleeve round-necked t-shirt and dark jeans. He carried a laptop bag along with him.

I realized that somehow every one of us had ended up dressing in either a white or a blue shirt or a t-shirt. Now that was called a family.

"Let's get going," Viaan announced, ushering us towards the awaiting helicopters. Neel, Asha, and Vikrant climbed into the first helicopter that took off almost immediately. While I, Viaan and Daksh got into another

helicopter.

I had been hesitant to climb into it for never having any experience of it before but when Viaan had stretched his hand out for me, no second thoughts entered my mind. I was inside the metal body of the beast when Viaan handed me the earplugs, "It can get quite loud in here."

And I found him and Daksh each wearing a pair of them making me follow suit. My hands trembled when the blades started to rotate, roaring loudly. He wasn't kidding when he said it would be loud in here.

I shut my eyes tightly as I felt the helicopter lift off. My heart pounding wildly inside my chest.

I'm going to die... I'm going to die... That was all I could think about. And even the fact that I wasn't going to die out of a terrific helicopter crash, my heart was going to pump itself to death...

All of my thoughts came to a standstill when I felt a warm rough hand over my smaller ones. I opened my eyes to see Viaan staring down at me, "it's alright. We have used this thing a lot of times, so we know it's safe."

"We are going to die..." I squeaked in a whisper, my eyes saucer wide. And before I knew it, I had pulled myself closer to Viaan as I hid my face in his chest. My cap tilted in a weird angle, letting me rest my head better over his torso. His heart was beating steadily as usual. I felt his hand wrap around my shoulder making me immediately feel safe. His calmness helped me calm down. The comfortable silence around, if I excluded the loud blade slapping, was honestly peaceful.

I sneaked a peek at Daksh who he was busy with at his tablet. I would have concluded that he didn't see what transpired between us. But then, a tiny curl of his lips told otherwise.

About ten minutes later, the helicopter started to descend. I could see the other helicopter landing down parallel to ours.

"We're here," the pilot announced, making me sit up straighter. I did not doubt that my cheeks were flaming red.

Thankfully, none of the brothers commented about it. We got down the helicopter only to be rushed towards a private jet that stood about a hundred meters from us.

"Aren't we supposed to get the security check?" I queried, trying to match my pace with that of the men.

"It doesn't apply when we are its owners," Neel replied, looking over his shoulder at me. I should have guessed it already. Many things don't apply to them. And many things they own already.

The pilots greeted us on reaching the plane and so did the two air hostesses who smiled at us welcomingly. I felt my mouth drop open as soon as I entered the plane.

I had never seen the interiors of a plane before but after seeing this one I could easily tell that it was a lavish one. Because one thing was for sure, the normal planes didn't have cream, brown and blue colored fluff sofas and soft cream rugs on the floor. Or the teapots before the sofas or the elegant lighting. On the other end, I could see three open doors. Two of them were washrooms while the other one was the bedroom with double bed!

I swear I could hear Aaryan's voice in my head saying, *'Welcome to the sweet side of the Raivardhan lives, Crazyness.'*

And I could did admit that it surely was one.

I followed in as Asha gently smiled and dragged me inside. Everyone was

already settling in. I took my seat on the single sofa by the window and watched as the jet soon started to take off. It was remarkable how smoothly it ascended, not at all like how I had heard about the first experience that was usually described to be. I watched Asha get up and head towards a bedroom, yawning. She sure looked exhausted today. I could make out sleep in her beautiful eyes.

"Why did we take the plane instead of the helicopters?" I couldn't help but voice out after a while. Not that I didn't like the plane, I loved it and was so relieved to be out of those helicopters but I also happened to love being so close to Viaan. But now that he was sitting on the three-seater couch with Neel. Away from me and out of my reach...

"Why? Did you miss being snuggled against your husband?" Daksh voiced out with a knowing smile as he stared at his tablet, to my utter horror.

"No!" I wanted to kick myself for my immediate denial but at the moment my deer in the headlights eyes told otherwise, "I mean I thought we were going to travel through the helicopter and had tried to mentally prepare myself. Isn't it the same, flying via a plane? Or flying via a helicopter?"

I tried to save face with the most reasonable lie as well as distract everyone from the reason Daksh had so insensitively spilled out. But I wasn't fooling anyone here. All the brothers had a tiny smirk playing on their lips which indeed made me roll my eyes.

Great! Just great!

"Jets are faster than helicopters. While it would have taken us around eight hours to travel through helicopters, this jet will have us there in not more than two hours," Viaan lifted a newspaper off the teapoy and started to go through it. I nodded in understanding even though he wasn't looking at me.

I sighed out in bliss as I turned to look out of the window. The cities and

greenery below us looked very lovely.

I had a feeling that it was going to be an amazing vacation with my in-laws, myself and Viaan. I was looking forward to it.

36. CHATTEES PART I

The flight landed just as smoothly as it had taken off. And true to Viaan's words, we roughly spent about two hours through the journey minding our own businesses.

The brothers were still busy sorting out their works for the week.

I, having nothing else to do, just stole glances at my husband who was busy staring at the laptop screen before him. At some point of time, I even heard clearing of throats which caused my blood to flush to my cheeks making me look away.

All the time, I had been cursing myself mentally for acting like a love-struck high school girl. I was really glad that Aaryan wasn't present along with us otherwise he wouldn't let me live through the journey with all the teasing.

No... I was definitely not in love with Viaan... Only attracted to him. A lot!

I felt a touch over my shoulder grabbing my attention. Asha smiled and nodded after the walking figures of my husband and two of my brother-in-laws who were making their way towards the gate.

"Go, it's going to take me some time to complete some protocols. I'll meet you at home." She slightly squeezed my shoulder bone reassuringly.

"Okay," I nodded as I replied before mindlessly slinging my handbag over my shoulder and getting down the plane before following after the three brothers that were busy talking to each other. Neel had been conversing with the officers by the terminal when Asha approached them. It didn't take much longer after that for them to enter the airport through the private terminal.

I adjusted the handbag over my shoulder and looked ahead at the remaining three family members of mine with whom I had to travel the rest of the two and half more hours of journey. Presumably, we were about eighty kilometers away from our actual destination. I already felt the fatigue set into my body. Or was this what they called a jet lag?

I watched Daksh jog ahead after announcing that he will find out what the problem was for not allowing the cars inside the apron. Viaan and Vikrant didn't stick around for him to come back, instead, they also proceeded towards the VIP gates making me follow. The vibration and the loud ringtone from my bag made my hand dive into my handbag fishing till it felt a smooth metallic surface that vibrated.

Viaan had got me a new phone the very next morning after that incident. And not just any phone but the latest iPhone that these guys were using even after I repeatedly asked him not to.

The only reason he gave that expensive object to me was the unbelievable privacy that the Apple guys provided before he went on explaining about encryption and satellite service and all. I still didn't get any of it, at all...

Instead, I just ended up nodding as if I understood him. How could I not understand all that explanation even after being a technical student? Well, let me put it in another way, I hated the subject of the networks then and I hate it now. Everything about that subject flew above my head. It was a miracle that I managed to pass my course. But the score was just over the threshold marks by one point. Yippee me!

Mom calling...

I smiled at the caller ID as I answered it, "Hello, ma! How are you?"

"I'm fine, dear. Where are you? How long will it take to reach there?" I heard my mother's usual worried voice from the other side. It was very rare that I traveled without my parents. Honestly, this was my second time in my whole life!

"You won't believe it, we are already here. They took a private jet."

I looked up to find a four-lane road outside the gate empty. The huge *under-construction* sign boards stood majestically on either side of the road. Some jelly stones and drums of tar laid unmoving on the side waiting to be poured into the potholes on the other half of the unmended road. About four expensive cars stood on the other end of the road, waiting for us.

"You already reached? Oh my! It must be really cold out there, right? I have heard it was quite windy in the North," I heard the surprise in my mom's voice making me chuckle. She was yet to get used to what the Raivardhans could do. I looked at the blaring sun, nope definitely not cold though the air here was a more humid than that back in Hyderabad.

"No mom, it's not that windy over here as you assumed it to be," I cheerfully continued to chit chat with my mother over the phone when I noticed that an envelope in Viaan's jacket pocket fluttered in the air just to fall on the middle of the road. It had been peeping for quite some time now before it finally decided to fall off. And he didn't notice it as he had been busy discussing something with Vikrant while they elegantly walked towards the awaiting cars. Daksh too had his back to us as he continued to instruct something to the drivers who were replying animatedly.

I contemplated calling out to him and informing him about the envelope but then I was already heading towards the same way, I could always pick it up

for him.

My mom continued talking about a proposal that Anjali had got, but my attention was all focused on the white envelope that laid harmlessly on the freshly metalled side of the road.

"Hang on for a second, something has dropped from Viaan's pocket," I subconsciously stalled her from filling me up with the juicy tweets while I was already bending over to pick the envelope up. My entire attention had been circumstances by the situation that I didn't hear the furiously honking in the background.

But when I did register it and look up, the phone slipped from my hand and fell while I froze in my place. The back of my mind processed the screen of my new phone cracking into several fragments while my mother kept calling out for me. Chills ran down my spine and fear pumped in my heart making it stop for a few seconds. The same happened with my ability to breathe. My body had locked itself in its place, right in the middle of the way for the huge truck.

On the other hand, Viaan casually turned around still talking to his brother when he saw me halfway bent down in the middle of the road and a truck racing towards me, honking like bonkers. Coldness settled into him for a brief second before the calculative Raivardhan side of his taking over.

The first thing he realized was that it was a regular eight-wheeler lorry and it didn't have additional wheels in the middle. Simultaneously, his mind had calculated the approximate speed at which it was traveling and the time he had left with to implement the best survival strategy. Leaving the talk in the middle, he ran at his full speed towards me, his wife who so happened to have frozen in the spot like a stuffed toy after seeing death rolling down the road.

Just when the truck was a few meters away from me, I finally realized that

anytime now my stupid brain would be all over the place. I swear, I saw my life flash before my eyes making me regret all the things I did and didn't do. I felt my world pause and my eyes close shut tight, hoping a miracle would occur and me to grow a pair of wings and fly away. Anyway, it looked like I would be growing them soon after coming out of this body.

But no, fate had other plans.

I felt a strong rough arm grab me by my shoulder and instead of being pulled or pushed away, I was pushed down just to fall on the ground right in the way of the truck!

All sorts of fear crawled over me learning the fact that Viaan had a suicidal tendency and a real death wish to be lying beside me. Though everything happened so fast, every single second felt like the 'slow-mode' button had been pushed.

Damn amazing feeling! I rolled my eyes mentally.

Viaan's strong hand had grabbed me before curling around my shoulders just to hold me tighter and closer to him. More specifically, his hot body. I felt his body quickly adjust to lay halfway over me, reducing the space between us as we laid down flat vertically in the direction of the moving truck. My panic levels rose as my brain failed to process all the sudden things that had just transpired. I clutched onto him as if my life depended on it and tightly shut my eyes close for the second time as they had flashed open when Viaan did all that circus.

Even though we were going to die, a part of me had calmed down as soon as I was in his arms.

The cool air and sunlight were replaced by hot fast-moving wind and shade with a feeling of something moving above us as we both laid still for what looked like hours together but was only a fraction of a minute.

My body had grown more rigid, if possible, with the fear that one small movement could kill us just like that even though all I wanted to do was get up and run away from here. But those few seconds were enough to leave me feeling the absolute dread course through my entire being.

The hovering presence disappeared and people rushed towards where we laid so still. I was still unable to accept the fact that it was over. Disbelief coursed through my body and so did the trembling. My eyes were blurring up due to shock and joy. Yet my breathing still remained ragged.

We came out of an impossible to escape accident unharmed, for the sake of god! And the fact that Viaan had risked his life to save mine touched my soul. His action reached so deeply in my heart that my heart surrender itself to him.

It was crystal clear, I had fallen for him. Who was I kidding before by saying I hadn't?

My heart pounded harder with the realization and the proximity between us. A kaleidoscope of butterflies fluttered in my stomach. I had fallen in love with my husband.

I felt Viaan move away from me before he sat up spitting fire but not before roughly pulling me up in a sitting position, "What the hell Rynah! How irresponsible are you? That truck could have..." He left his sentence incomplete as he looked around bitterly digesting the fact what could have happened if he hadn't reached me in time. He didn't even want to think of that possibility at the moment as his stomach clenched painfully.

All that I could do was suck in a breath trying to calm my thundering heart. It was a relief that no one was hurt. Daksh immediately knelt beside us, checking for any injuries on either of us while the screeching of a car's tires attracted attention before it raced down on the other side of the road after the truck that had almost killed us. And I eerily suspect seeing Vikrant with a

clenched jaw behind the wheels.

"What were you thinking? Why were you bending down so carelessly in the middle of a damn road?" Viaan's further questions made me look into his furious eyes that also harbored concern. His open scowl made the other driver take a step back feeling intimidated. The tears in my eyes continued to roll down even when I willed them to stop but he didn't care about it. Only one thought had clouded his mind. The one thought that plagued him - *she better be crying than be dead.*

"I... I was..." I sniffled before raising my trembling hand which held the envelope, "Picking this up."

The small embarrassing hiccup that involuntarily left my lips softened his expression. And the envelope and the sight of me trying hard not to break down, made him sigh.

The way his fingers gently touched mine as he took the envelope from me, I knew one thing for sure that I had unintentionally risked my life to collect something more important than his own life for him.

His eyes bore into mine, searching for something that I didn't know. But I was already lost into the chocolate swirls of his. A tender look had taken over them making them look even more beautiful.

Could this beautiful man ever feel something for me?

I was ready to pay anything as long as he looked at me that way.

"He wasn't supposed to be here. This road is under construction. The heavy-duty vehicles weren't allowed in this part of the area," Daksh's grave voice caught our attention.

Daksh was typing something over his phone with his eyebrows knitted in a

frown.

"What do you mean?" My thoughts came out in a trembling voice.

Daksh looked back at me as he spoke, "I suspect that it was intentionally done and not an accident."

My blood ran cold upon hearing his words. Intentionally? But who would want to kill me and why?

I looked over at Viaan who had a frown and a distinct look like he was rampaging through a thousand thoughts in his head.

My eyes found my now crushed iPhone flashing static screen. The display was ruined, that was for sure.

And at once two phones went off. Making Daksh and Viaan end up looking at their phones.

"Here," Viaan handed the phone with a familiar number flashing over the screen.

Mom calling...

Hesitantly I received the call while Daksh talked over his phone a few feet away from me.

"Hello, mom?" I breathed out trying to compose myself as much as possible.

"Rynah? What happened? What was that noise and why weren't you answering? Did something happen? Tell me what happened, dear," She was anxious I could tell but I didn't want to make her any more anxious so I resorted to replying, "I accidentally dropped my phone, mom. That's it. It stopped working after that."

"You are such a stupid girl! That was a brand new phone and you do that? You took away ten years of our lives due to worry! I thought that something bad happened over there!" She was full on yelling on the other side.

"Mom, mom... I need to go. I will talk to you later. Viaan needs his phone." I didn't wait for her to reply and ended the call. I didn't feel bad about her scolding me because I knew that she didn't know what had exactly happened.

Daksh turned to us, placing the phone back into his pocket as he hurriedly informed while rushing towards the car, "Vikrant has him. We need to get there now."

"Prakash, take madam back home and help her settle down," Viaan ordered the drivers while rushing towards the car where Daksh had already climbed into the driver seat.

"Rynah, go with them and we will be back soon," before I could say anything he hopped into the passenger seat before the car raced down the road.

I was left sitting in the middle of the road, flabbergasted, surrounded by the drivers.

"Madam, shall we?" An old driver with pepper and salt hair and wrinkles on his face asked, whom I assumed to be Prakash.

Looking one last time towards the way where the brothers had disappeared, I got up and dusted away the invisible dust from my clothes before nodding in reply.

Looks like I would soon be learning what was going on out there...

36. CHATTEES PART II

“There's nothing to worry about,

Rynah. They are the Raivardhans!" That was what I had been trying to explain to myself. But who was I kidding? I was dying out of anxiety here.

None of them had returned nor answered the calls!

On the other hand, what I didn't know at that time was that Vikrant had raced after the lorry, zigzagging across the road to confuse and induce fear in the lorry's driver. He took his own time while overtaking the other vehicles on the road and indirectly manipulating the driver to take a less congested road. Just what Vikrant had been expecting.

Just as the GPS in the car indicated clear traffic ahead, Vikrant changed the gears and pushed down the acceleration as he raced to overtake the lorry. But not before sending his coordinates to his brothers and his other men. The driver was palpitating in fear, especially when he registered the sunroof of the car sliding open. Vikrant drove the car about a hundred meters away from the approaching truck and skidded it to a stop before he was out of the sunroof to standing on the car roof. He quickly grabbed his gun from the holster on the back of his belt and pointed it out at the lone driver in the lorry.

The panic swept into the veins of the driver at the sight of the black shiny metal in Vikrant's hand. His foot pressed against the acceleration with the

intention to ram into the car, ending the matter once and for all. But Vikrant had other plans.

When he didn't see any signs of the driver stopping the lorry, Vikrant aimed for the right shoulder of the driver, beside his heart and pulled the trigger. The pain and the shock coursed through the driver and before he understood what was happening, he had pulled the air brakes and allowed the lorry to slow down just to come to a stop a few inches from Vikrant's car.

Vikrant hopped down from the car roof and climbed the lorry to pull out the notorious driver who was now screaming and crying out in pain. Soon after that, a few more cars came to a screeching halt behind the lorry. One of them contained Daksh and Viaan while the rest of them had their private men in suits.

The Raivardhans had made sure to secure the road on either side to avoid any audience to witness the scene.

Without wasting another moment, Vikrant pulled the driver into the nearest SUV with tinted glasses while two of their men drove the car and the truck away. Within ten minutes of stopping the truck, they cleared the scene and left for one of their warehouses where they could investigate the driver thoroughly, without any interruption.

But me over here couldn't get over the worry for my family, for my husband...

I hadn't left the living room, where I had been brought upon arriving. The only thing I could do so far was let my eyes look around the room which had the mezzanine on the first floor. It was a two-story mansion set in the middle of the big plot. It also happened to have fountains before the house. The mansion was once again magnificent. Unlike our home in Hyderabad, this one was classically designed with a royal theme.

The sound of the car coming to stop had me running towards the main door. My heart pounded with anticipation. But looking at Asha getting down the car, my face fell a bit.

"I heard about what happened. Are you alright?" she looked worried as she kept her hand over my shoulder and checked for any injuries with her eyes.

I nodded my head before asking in agitation, "They are not hurt, right?"

Asha smiled tenderly at me as she replied, "It will take a lot more than just a truck to even blow the hair on their head. My boys are much more than that."

I nodded in understanding from where she was coming. I had experienced their way of handling things on the first hand. And I knew she was right, it required more than that to shake the ground on which they stood.

"Come on, get in and freshen up," she pulled me inside when we heard two more cars drive down the path to stop before us. Neel and Vikrant got out from the first while Daksh and Viaan got down from the second car making me finally breathe in relief. My heart sped up at his sight making my mind go blank.

They looked tired, so neither of us thought of drilling the answers out of them, for the time being. It wasn't like I was very much capable of forming a single coherent sentence without blushing furiously or stammering like a moron. And it wasn't like Viaan wouldn't tell me if something threatened my life. He would even go ahead and take extreme steps to keep us safe, keep *me* safe.

I didn't realize that I had forgotten about the world apart from us. The only one that was visible to me was Viaan whose deep voice kissed the insides of me and induced shivers. I watched him climb up the stairs at the entrance and headed inside while I followed him like the lost puppy I was.

He took the grand spiral staircase and headed to the first floor and I felt like I was gliding on the after him. The first floor was just as massive as the ground! But I didn't care to stop and admire the decors, rather, I ended up in the room where I had seen Viaan walk into. Our luggage rested in a corner and Viaan was nowhere in sight but his jacket was discarded on the bed.

I assumed that he went into the washroom making me sit on the bed trying to calm my racing heart down.

Why in the hell did I even end up here? I blinked to myself trying to answer the bloody question.

The door opened allowing a shirtless Viaan walk into the room with the low hung jeans of his. I stood up staring at his defined muscles, shamelessly might I add. My mouth could possibly be hanging open, or not, I don't know. I think I heard his deep voice saying something but my head was too clouded with his hotness on display that it didn't register anything. And his mouth moved to make me want to kiss those kissable lips.

My heart started to skyrocket when I watched him cover the distance between us with those long strong legs of his.

Was he going to kiss me?

He came to stand foot to foot with me and leaned forward making my breathing hard. His chocolate brown eyes swirled with such an intensity that it made me melt on the inside.

How could anyone be so handsome and perfect? He was just as Anjali had first defined the Raivardhans, *the epitome of handsomeness*.

He gave me that half-amused smile of his before he snapped his fingers at my face bringing me out of my trance, "Rynah? Do you hear me?"

My eyes widened when I realized what had just happened and what I had just done!

"Y-yeah yeah, I mean, no, sorry. I was thinking about something," I stammered, trying to put up some distance between us so that my brain could function again. I walked towards the other side of the room before mentally facepalming myself several times. I looked out of the closed glass door of the balcony and pressed my eyes shut tightly while pursing my lips together trying to remove this feeling of embarrassment I was harboring.

"I had just asked you to get me another shirt from the walk-in closet on your left and get this one destroyed. I'm heading in for a shower," he handed me a wet shirt which had red stains on it, making me immediately exclaim in panic, "Blood!?!"

I covered the three-step between us as I started inspecting for any injury on him with my hands. His hands were covered in blood. My heart thundering in my chest at the sight, "Are you okay? Are you bleeding anywhere?"

His skin looked undamaged on every part of his visible torso, yet I couldn't stop the tears from blurring my vision. The thought of him being hurt, hurt my heart inside.

"Hey, hey," Viaan grabbed hold of my upper arms, stopping me from my further inspection and making me look into his eyes. The teardrops made my vision kaleidoscopic. A beautiful kaleidoscope made up of his face as he added in a tender voice, "I'm completely fine. That's the driver's blood, he got injured because of the chase. You don't have to worry, okay?"

I nodded my head not trusting my voice. I felt so vulnerable yet so powerful in his presence. I realized that he had become everything for me that he didn't know what he meant to me. I didn't even know when it happened. But all I knew was that I couldn't live without him now or ever. I wanted him. No, I *needed* him.

I wanted to hug him and it looked like he wanted it too but then he removed his hands from my upper arms and headed back inside the washroom, after an eon of contemplation which might have been my over-exaggeration, leaving me outside to mull over my thoughts and regret the lack of courage I displayed at the moment. Only if I had known that everything was going to change for the good. *Soon.*

37. SAINTEES

I looked around the dark themed room only after Viaan had disappeared into the washroom. Everything in the room was in different shades of blue and gold. A Georgian chandelier hung from the ceiling over the bedroom bench that stood majestically at the end of the bed. The party preparations had started after a day of rest. Well, they were already going on, it was me who needed rest. I still felt sleepy though.

The metal frame of the bed had an ancient brass finish to it. Golden curtains hung behind the bed making it look even more sophisticated. The big Gothic style windows looked over the magnificent looking gardens. On the adjacent wall was a pretty light blue and golden dressing table with a smaller chandelier hanging above it. There was a light blue futon sofa beside the

dresser. The room was overall royal to say the least. The Raivardhan taste.

I settled on the soft mattress, feeling the silk sheets under the skin of my palms, subconsciously. The party was this evening and my heart accelerate at the realization.

This would be the first party hosted by the Raivardhans that we would be having without any bad blood or irritation between us. The first important party to Viaan that he would be hosting it as my husband. The nervousness crept inside me and the tiredness made me fall back on the bed in exhaustion. I just had to relax for a bit before I start getting ready for the party.

My eyes burned and my eyelids felt heavy making me close them for a second. Just for a second, I let my eyes rest.

"Rynah?" My head buzzed with the voice in the background.

"You need to wake up, Rynah," the same voice again whispered in my ear. A gentle touch of something against my cheek and I moaned as it stroked my skin, dragging me out of the voidness. My eyes fluttered open to meet the molten chocolates swirling in his.

"That's pretty..." My broken filter mouth blabbered in haze as his eyes sparkled.

"I'm glad that you find my eyes pretty but now you will have to get up and get ready if you don't want to be late," Viaan's voice sounded amused even to my malfunctioning brain while his eyes crinkled a little as they laughed making me frown.

"Late for what?" Another unfiltered thought came through before everything came back like a flood inside my head. With wide eyes, I sat up cursing, "Oh shit!"

Though I felt the slight panic take over me, not from waking up but from the realization that I was going to be late for the party, I didn't fail to notice my husband's amazing reflex who gracefully dodged the possible head butting that would have taken place due to my clumsiness.

"You take care of what mom has instructed you with," Viaan ordered looking towards his right, making me follow his gaze to find an audience with awed expressions on their faces.

"Yes, Mr. Raivardhan! Don't worry about anything, she is in good hands," one of the four ladies standing by the door said.

Viaan nodded before walking out of the door. My eyes followed him till the wall blocked my view.

"Good evening Mrs. Raivardhan. These are Geeta, Saroj, and Harpreet. And I am Maliha. We will be your makeup artist and hair stylists for the night!" I must say, Maliha was very much excited to dress me up as she ended her little zealous introduction with a clap like a five-year-old in a candy shop.

Oh boy, I really got scared now.

I stepped out of the walk-in closet in a golden high low gown that had a deep back.

Gasps erupted around the room when the girls noticed me.

"Oh my god! You look stunning!" Maliha complemented in admiration. I felt like the queen of the world receiving the approving gazes of others. They didn't delay with hairstyling which was a simple messy bun. It did look good with the dress though. We could hear the faint music from downstairs indicating that the party had begun. I had to join them soon.

To add an air of intimidation and uniqueness, Geeta put some temporary henna design tattoos on my upper arm which proceeded towards the back. My golden Jimmy Choo heels had a lot of strips for a better grip.

"She is so beautiful already, and looks even more beautiful with every addition that we make," Harpreet sighed in adulation, becoming the reason of me blush.

They finished by dabbing another coat of lip gloss over my lips and a touch of hairspray to my bun. I liked what they did with me. Just as they packed their stuff, the door opened revealing my dashing husband in a black two-piece classic suit with a white shirt, in the process of putting on his black metal wristwatch. The black insides of the collar and cuffs of the shirt stood out.

"Is she ready?" he asked in his deep voice, making Maliha nod her head. His eyes shifted to mine, giving me a head to toe scan. In other words, checking me out. My cheeks darkened under his intense gaze.

God! The way he makes me feel merely with his gaze!

His eyes stayed stuck on my exposed legs and back longer than usual as he grumbled, "I definitely don't like the dress."

The girls beside me stiffened at his words making me pity them.

"Don't worry, I keep getting that line every now and then. You can go. Thank you for your service tonight." They bobbed their heads in relief at my easy smile before making a beeline for the door, to get the hell out of here before my scowling husband decided to add something else. Slipping into my Jimmy Choo, I sashayed a bit as I walked up to him and snaked my hand around his bicep with a teasing smile, knowing full well that he wouldn't do anything to delay us from getting to the party.

"If we were not running late, I would have made you change the dress before going down," Viaan remarked with furrowed eyebrows, leading me out of the room and down the grand stairs.

His warm presence beside me filled my stomach with wild butterflies. He walked slower than his usual pace to let me keep up with him. Once we were in the lobby, he took a left and guided me towards the room where the party was taking place. The music became louder and louder as we neared a beautifully carved double door, guarded by two doormen in a black tailcoat and striped gray pants over a white shirt and a bow tie.

They opened the door, letting us in and then I saw it, the humongous ballroom from over the mezzanine. If the stairs leading to the first floor in the living room were grand, the stairs leading to the ballroom were *grand*! The entire ballroom was one level below and people looked up to see us standing and looking over them. Everyone was in their best attire. The men in tuxedos, the women in various evening gowns and sparkling saris, with glasses of different drinks in their hands.

There was another huge double door on the other end of the ballroom beyond which were the lush green grass and beautiful night. The entire place was illuminated with a golden hue of the lights giving it a touch of Victorian-era ball.

"Let's go down," Viaan said, pulling me out of my gawking and placing his hand on the small of my back as we slowly descended the marble stairs. Asha, who was talking to some guests by the end of the stairs, looked up and smiled as we reached her.

"You are looking beautiful," she complimented, giving me a half hug.

"But not more than you, mom," I replied with a proud smile looking at how ravishing she looked in that dress of hers. Viaan entertained the guests who were accompanying Asha. Not much later, I was introduced to them.

They were the owner of a well established tea factory in Darjeeling.

The same thing resumed for the next hour or two before Viaan decided to sit down on one of the sofas put up on the sides of the room for this particular purpose and relax our aching heels. Or rather my aching heels. He was just so sweet that it made my heart melt every time he did something so thoughtful.

"Do you want something to drink?" he asked as I sat down on the fluffy peach sofa and looked up at him.

"Yes, please! That would be so kind of you," I smiled, loving him more for that. My throat felt dry and my heels did not want me to go get myself anything.

He gave me a tender smile and headed towards the opposite side of the huge ballroom where a bartender was juggling the metal bottles behind the counter. I sighed in bliss at the thought of how lucky I had been to land myself a husband like Viaan, my eyes tracing the ring that had been given to me by his family. It was the most gorgeous ring I had ever seen! A gold rose with a sapphire in middle.

I looked up just in time to find a familiar figure of Nishika's with the excess makeup and slutty green dress, saying something to my husband. Her wide smile and the hug she gave him like he was still single, made something boil inside me.

All her parts almost touched all his parts causing a volcanic eruption to occur inside my head. All that I was seeing now was red and blue because of the anger and the hurt. Angry with the fact that she still hadn't let my husband go and hurt by the fact that I knew she was the love of his life... Still, the anger won over the hurt and wanted me to mark my territory. I was ready for fight, for him, if needed. She might have been something to him in the past but that was before I came along. Now that I was here, she better learn how to step down.

I watched the duo sit on the high stools of the bar and talk like they hadn't talked for eons together. And what pissed me off more was the crowd of girls slowly increasing around him! One by one, other vultures came in to try and grab their desired prey. That was it!

I lost my patience and before I lost my cool, my legs had already carried me halfway across the room. Aaryan came into my line of sight all of a sudden, and tried to talk to me but I was so focused over the hungry hyenas that even he understood not to stall me when I was nothing less than a dispatcher on a mission unless he wanted his handsome little head served on a platter.

Reaching to stand behind the bold bitch who was brave enough to sit beside my husband and feel his bicep with her manicured claws, I schooled my features from a scornful scowl to an innocent sweet one. My mind was conjuring a thousand thoughts at the same time, conspiring against these little competitors that thought that I would sit back and just let them have their way.

"Oh, Divya! They are calling for you there," I tapped on her shoulder and gave her a sickly sweet smile while on the inside I wanted to roast her slowly and painfully on the candle flames.

"My name is Taniya, not Divya," she replied bewildered.

"Yeah, yeah, Taniya. The waiter over there was looking for you saying something about someone looking for you," I pointed at the waiter at the very end of the ballroom who seemed to be searching for someone looking left and right.

Poor thing didn't know what was going to hit him.

Skeptically, she got up looking at me before making her way towards the other end of the room.

Okay, bitches, one down. Three more to go.

I sat in her place and turned towards my husband who was interacting with the other bitches surrounding him but I didn't doubt that he had seen the little trick that I had pulled to chase away one of the clawed eagles who were hoping to steal my husband. After all, I was *Mrs. Viaan Raivardhan* now.

It pissed me off even more that Viaan did nothing to chase away these vultures. I gave them a fake sweet smile accompanied with my death glares, hoping that they felt awkward and went away.

Go away, bitches! Hands off the merchandise. There were many other fishes in the water, in huge quantities. But this one was mine!

I was about to do something else to attract their attention when all of a sudden the music went off and instead Aaryan's voice echoed through the speakers as he stood by the band and announced, "this is for all the couples that are meant for each other."

He looked at me and winked before adding, "ladies go grab your men. And gentlemen, make the night special for your lovely ladies."

I flushed understanding the hidden intent of Aaryan's announcement and felt shy. How was I going to ask Viaan for a dance? Shouldn't it be the other way around?

The initial music started and I recognized *Despacito* by Luis Fonsi as I turned to face my husband again but what stopped my poor little heart and filled me with dread was Nishika standing before him with her hand raised in the air, asking for the dance that was supposed to be mine!

"For old times' sake?" She smiled so radiantly that I wanted to slap her again and again for trying to hypnotize my man.

I wanted to grab Viaan's bicep and drag him towards the stage but looking at him look at Nishika's hand and placing his own in it without a thought, just shot my level of disbelief to a whole new level. And he had the audacity to reply, "for the old times."

My jaw dropped open as my brain stopped working. Had he even thought about me when he placed his hand in hers?

I guess not, when the person you love stands before you, you don't think about anything else other than to be with them. Even if it was just for a few seconds...

Nishika took Viaan's hand and led him to the dance floor. I recognized the dance style she was performing from the moves. Salsa.

Viaan capered toward the twirling figure of Nishika.

Placing his hands on her hips, Viaan and Nishika did some difficult and hot salsa moves that I could never do even in my hundred lives.

Out of nowhere, a hand appeared before my eyes, distracting me from the ponderous breaking of my heart. My eyes shot up to the owner of the hand to find it to be Aaryan, asking for a dance. I panicked and shook my head. What would people think about us, about me, when they see me dancing with my brother-in-law instead of my husband when Aaryan himself announced something that brazen? But he dragged me to the floor nevertheless...

Aaryan twirled me around before getting me in the basic dance position and started swaying.

I turned around to lock my eyes with Viaan's at least once but had to immediately turn away trying to focus on not maiming Aaryan's feet. Because all Viaan was doing was dancing with her...

The dance continued to the rhythm. The music filled life into the hall. Many other couples join us on the dance floor.

Aaryan twirled me again before letting go of my hand and leaving me to spin away. What I didn't realize was that Viaan had also done the same with Nishika.

Not knowing the next step or what actually to do, I ended up coming into Viaan's path and slammed into his chest. Our eyes met and my heart picked up its pace and I could say that both of us were surprised. He didn't even utter a word, just stared at me. Feeling dejected when he didn't make a move to hold me, I slowly pulled away to leave.

*'Despacito
Quiero respirar tu cuello despacito'*

The chorus began causing goosebumps to rise all over my skin. And it was not just the music but also because Viaan's hands had snaked around my waist as he pulled me back to his chest, letting me collide once again. Before the dance started. Just like we had practiced all those times.

We were in sync. His hands moved all over my body, igniting a passion within me filled with fire. A passion for him. I didn't know how I was dancing or even what I was doing, I just left Viaan's hands guide my body as I let it go.

*'Despacito
Quiero desnudarte a besos despacito'*

Viaan pushed me down and behind him letting me slide from between his legs and I ended up on the other side shocked at what I had achieved.

By the time I recovered and got up from the floor, Viaan was again dancing with Nishika as they got back to that sexy dance of theirs which I knew I

couldn't do.

Feeling the presence on my side again, I wanted to look at the person but I couldn't take my eyes away from Viaan and Nishika. Anyway, Aaryan who had been looking back and forth between Viaan and me, offered to continue the dance to save my face but it had come to an end for me. I longed for only one man who was dancing with another woman. It left me heartbroken by none other than my own husband...

I turned to leave, unable to watch Viaan with her anymore. He seemed engrossed with whatever Nishika had to say to him when I turned to look him again. Twice now. What I didn't know was that he had been looking at me when I looked away and I glanced at him when he turned away.

I could still hear the song as I reached our room after hurrying up the stairs. My reflection in the mirror looked sad with what minimal light was supplied to it. I was no longer confident in my looks. I felt insecure about myself.

On the other hand, Viaan had come after me, dodging all the guests who tried to engage him in small talks.

I was more than surprised to see the reflection of Viaan behind mine when he walked into the room and locked the door behind him.

He sauntered his way to stand with his chest against my back while I was still trying to contemplate what had transpired. His eyes raked my reflection causing shivers to erupt down my spine. I could still hear the song from the ballroom.

'Despacito
Quiero respirar tu cuello despacito'

His big warm hands landed on my shoulders. The heat from his body passed to mine making me suck in a sharp breath and within a fraction of a second, I

was turned around even before the word '*despacito*' ended. And the next thing I know, I feel his warm, soft lips against mine.

The song in the background dissolved somewhere in the corner of my mind and only the feel of his lips against mine dominated my entire consciousness. One of his hands held my waist like a vice against his body and the other one grabbed my knee and pulled it to his hip. My hands found his hair automatically and fisted into them, pulling him closer to me, as if he already wasn't.

I felt the excitement rise inside of me and my body suddenly felt feverish but not sick. I wanted to cool it off. For that, I had to strip, which I wouldn't actually mind doing if he took this to the next level rather than sticking to a sensual kiss. I would be more than happy to oblige, to be honest.

Viaan swept something off the table, producing a lot of clinking noises. Not that I cared nor did he look like. I don't know how I ended up sitting on the dresser and Viaan between my knees before he pulled me flushed against himself. But again, we just didn't care. He nibbled on my lower lip asking for my permission which I eagerly granted.

Our tongues glided and played with each other, enjoying the taste of each other. He tasted like some cocktail that he had had previously, rich and intoxicating.

He pulled the straps of my dress away and slowly trailed his lips down to my jaw and finally onto my collar bone, peppering me with open mouth butterfly kisses. His beard pricked a bit, inducing a ticklish feeling wherever it touched. And his wet tongue made moans escape my lips in pleasure.

Placing his forehead against my neck, he inhaled deeply causing a visible shiver roll down my body, right there in his arms.

"Tell me what you want, so that I can give it to you," he asked in a husky

tone, turning me on completely. I couldn't believe what was happening. It looked like a dream. A beautiful dream.

"Anything?" I asked, opening my lust hooded eyes for confirmation. Making sure that he won't go back on his words.

"Anything," he withdrew to look me in the eyes as he promised. His eyes shone with raw emotions. Some I could recognize to be amusement and admiration. And I closely suspected the others to be need and hunger.

It gave me the courage to go ahead and say what I had been wanting to have the entire evening, "you."

I could tell that it surprised him a bit but immediately his lips curled into an amused smile while his eyes sparkled with mirth. Putting his one hand around my shoulder and another below my knees, he suddenly lifted me from the dresser causing a surprised yelp out of my lips.

The song playing in the ballroom again registered by my head. As he carried me towards our bed.

He graced me with a genuine smile of his, not breaking his eye contact with me. Laying me gently down, he pulled back to look at me wholly before he snooped down and captured my lips in a possessive and dominating kiss.

I was on fire and he was the one fueling it. Unbuttoning his shirt, I pushed it over his broad shoulders with my trembling fingers and he did the rest of it for me.

Our private little show had started with the song but it didn't end with it. I was glad that it didn't end with it, otherwise, I would have ended Viaan for that. Or perhaps not. Who knows? All that I cared about at the moment was to take in all the pleasure he was giving me and he knew very well how to make every part of me to come alive.

What we had to do a long time ago, did it that fateful night. For once I felt like no one could take my place. Not even his lover Nishika because Viaan was mine and only mine. Even if it was only for tonight...

38. ADHTEES

My eyes fluttered open to the sight of a broad muscular golden chest.

My eyes automatically moved up to look at the serene face of my handsome husband. He looked so peaceful, so relaxed. My body was sore out of proportion making the previous night flashed before my eyes and I ended up blushing profusely at the things that we did. Things that happened between us. The familiar sight of my husband prevented me from having a panic attack in this new place. Especially, with that warm arm of his wrapped around my waist, holding me flush against him. I better get out of the room before he wakes up. I didn't know what to expect from him, this particular morning...

I silently picked his arm up trying to get out of Viaan's grip without waking him up. But he tightened his arm further around me by pulling me closer.

Great Rynah! Just G-R-E-A-T! Now, what were you going to do?

I slowly turned around to face him, thinking of waking him just enough that he would let go of me and go back to sleep. But when I saw his innocent looking angelic face relaxed, I couldn't help but let out a sigh. How was I supposed to disturb this sleeping face now? All I wanted to do was cuddle further into his warmth and savor this moment forever. The moment when he was only mine before he went back to her...

"I don't know what to feel or think anymore. You don't know but I... But I..." Unable to continue, I trailed off. I had started to pour out my emotions into my words to a sleeping man. Amazing! Just freaking amazing!

"You what?" I let out a short shriek when Viaan asked in his deep hoarse morning voice and closed eyes when I didn't finish my sentence.

"Y-You are awake!?! I thought you were sleeping! You freaking pretended to be sleeping!" Panic had gone into overdrive inside my body. And did I have to go ahead and say that to him thinking that he was sleeping!?!

Stupid stupid Rynah! You did it again!

Viaan opened his eyes and looked into mine. I felt his grip over my waist loosen a bit. Taking that as an advantage, I sprung out of his hold to run away from him but Viaan being Viaan grabbed me by my wrist and pulled me back. I crashed over his very naked chest and felt my cheeks heat up even after what had happened between us the last night, when his other hand circled my waist, holding me in its place. Well, not just last night but I guess till the dawn of this morning or even more, I don't exactly remember the time since I was extremely exhausted. He regarded me with a cool gaze as he asked, "why do you always run away when you feel that the situation is going to be difficult to handle?"

"I don't run away!" I exclaimed in denial.

That was bad, Rynah. Remember, he is Viaan and Viaan doesn't let go of things that easily.

And to prove how correctly my inner voice had pointed out, Viaan countered, "oh yes you do. Mostly with me. Now continue with what you were saying."

If I say that my eyes were wide than the headlights of the car, would it make sense? I gawked at him.

"Nothing! I was saying nothing at all!"

Viaan narrowed his eyes, "I won't be letting you go today until you spill whatever you were saying."

I pushed my lower lip a bit out pouting as I whined, "that's not fair..."

Viaan's eyes flickered to my lips before darkening considerably. When his eyes met mine again, he smirked, "I don't really care. By the way, the cleaning staff will be here soon and I think they should also enjoy this little private show of ours."

I was seriously in a big dilemma between kissing him and killing him after hearing those words. Finally, not finding any other options, I closed my eyes and huffed in frustration as the pain came back crashing on my heart again. The pain of the truth that he was going to go back to her...

"I don't know what to say. I know that you don't love me when I have fallen deeply for you. You behave like you feel things for me when you love somebody else." I huffed again before opening my eyes. I could tell, my words had left him in a tiny shock. Yup buddy, I know that you love Nishika...

"What?" He snorted incredulously like it was hard to believe.

"I know about Nishika. And how much you love her..." I added letting him know that there was no need to continue with the pretense because I knew...

God! It felt so good to get that off my chest after such a long time. But then the relief I had found in confessing to him had changed into bewilderment when he exclaimed in frustration, "What bullshit! Who told you that?"

I felt like one of those cartoons with button eyes who just blinked. What did he mean by that? Had I misheard it? No, he was loud and clear when he

confessed to Nishika... Then why was he reacting this way?

"But I heard you confess that to her back home, by myself. With my very own ears."

Viaan sat up looking serious, with me on his laps. I pulled up the bedsheets to cover myself, very much aware that none of us were clothed at the moment.

"Do you remember the date or day and where you heard something that absurd?" He asked as he picked his laptop from the nightstand and opened it.

"I can never forget that day. It was the day of our reception. You were with her in the library back home in Hyderabad. She was very upset about us getting married," I recalled all the things that I remembered about the incident, every second felt like a stab to my heart.

Viaan let go of me, letting me sit beside him and opened a remote application connecting to a private network.

Entering all the credentials, he clicked on a 'Monitor' button and selected recordings. A huge list of recordings appeared on the screen which he filtered out using the search and got all the footage of that day. He selected the library footage and fast-forwarded it till Nishika entered.

"How can you do this to me, Viaan? How could you marry her when I've been waiting for you my entire life? You knew about my feelings for you, then why didn't you consider it?" She shouted as soon as she entered.

Viaan closed the file he was holding and sighed in irritation.

"See Nishika, we are good friends, always have been. Whatever feelings you have had always have been from your side, not mine. And this isn't the first time that I'm telling you this. But here, I'm saying it all over again! It's not like I love you but now I'm married to her, she is my wife now," Viaan in the

footage stated making Nishika look bitter, on the other hand, my mouth fell open in shock!

He had said that! Viaan had actually said *that!* And I had only heard from the part where he said 'I love you'...

Stupid stupid Rynah! Damn... I suffered for nothing for so long!

If I had only asked him about it before...

"Hey, hey! Look at me. It's not your fault," Viaan cupped my face and turned it to look at him, "it was the circumstances that had made us be the way we were. Don't cry now."

It was only then that I realized that I was crying and unable to resist it, I threw my arms around my husband and cried out louder on his chest. And as sweet as Viaan could be, he pressed me closer to his body and slowly rubbed my back, whispering sweet nothings.

He was all mine, he had always been only mine!

I had never thought that I would be sobbing so uncontrollably in happiness while Viaan held me in his arms, saying all the sweet things. Might I not forget about our birth suits.

He pulled back after a while when I had calmed down and swept away the hair from my face, "now shall we go down for our breakfast? Everyone must be waiting downstairs."

Blushing pink, I nodded in reply. Smiling that breathtaking smile of his, he pecked my forehead before getting out of the bed. I was a blushing puddle sitting on the bed. Gosh! Today cannot be better than this already!

Wearing a comfortable pair of black high waisted wide leg trousers and white sleeveless V-neck top, I glanced for one last time in the mirror. I was sore throughout my body, so it had been difficult to move much initially but later I got a hang of it.

By the time I got ready, Viaan was standing by the big arched window and talking over his phone in a blue Henley and cream chinos.

Gosh... Simply so handsome.

As if being called, he turned over his shoulder and looked me in the eyes. My breath had been knocked off looking at him look at me like that and knowing for the fact that he was mine.

"Okay, Daniel. I will talk to you later," he ended the call and turned completely to face me. My breathing labored as his long legs started to eat up the distance between us. Without actually pausing, his fingers eased into my hair before his lips came down on mine in a passionate kiss. It didn't take me much time to react as I kissed him back just as passionately. My hands dug into his hair, trying to pull him closer to me feeling needy of him. His other hand went around my waist to pull me flush against his lower body making me shudder at the recall of the previous night.

Our lips moved in sync before he took my upper lip between his teeth and sucked it. I moaned into his mouth at the work his lips and teeth did on me.

The slight knock on the door made him groan as it prevented us from taking it any further than a kiss. And I must say, I wanted to chop off the head of the person who found it good to knock at the door of a newly married couple, early this morning.

Nevertheless, we pulled away with the hunger for each other still intact in our eyes. A promise to myself that this wasn't over here, it will be resumed. Soon.

Running a hand through his hair, Viaan went to open the door with me in tow behind him. I straightened my clothes. On the other side of the door stood a man in a suit who looked a little agitated.

"Good morning sir, sorry that I have come this early in the morning but I've some news about *him*", the guy started but stopped as soon as he saw me. Viaan too looked over his shoulder before saying, "you go ahead and have your breakfast. I'll join you in a bit."

My curiosity surfaced wanting to know what this was all about but I couldn't just press Viaan into telling me what was going on.

With a heavy heart and an immense curiosity, I slowly walked out with the hopes of listening to at least a bit of whatever they were going to discuss.

The strange man walked into our bedroom with Viaan as he started, "I received the news from the South African police that he got his bail yesterday."

The door shut close behind them, drowning away their voices. Sighing dejectedly, I headed over to the grand staircase and started to walk down. Only because I didn't know what was going to happen next. Else I would have locked myself in the room and stayed there for an eternity.

Why? Because, as soon as I entered the dining room, all I could see was irritating smirks on all my brother-in-laws' faces, like they all knew what had happened the previous night. Daksh was sipping coffee from his mug while staring at the screen of his tablet. Neel was flipping through some magazine while Vikrant, who sat on the leather recliner by the window with his feet on the ottoman before him, typing away on his laptop, paused for a second. But just for a second. When I looked at Aaryan, he was sitting on the dining chair and looked at me like I was a compressed circus that would burst up open before him for his entertainment.

"What?" I dared to ask, sounding as innocent as I could.

"You ignored your favorite brother-in-law after he had been away for almost two whole days and didn't even care to say that you missed me or even greet me for that matter," Aaryan was the first one to reply as he huffed dramatically as if it hurt him deeply but continued, "I don't know if I should be congratulating you or feel disgusted to discuss about you and my brother in the room together."

My eyes almost bulged out, "w-what are you talking about? We are married so we do sleep in the same room!"

I feigned innocence. Thankfully Asha wasn't anywhere in sight. Or would it have been better for me if she was in here?

"Come on now, everyone knows what happened the previous night," Aaryan wriggled his eyebrows with mirth flashing in his eyes.

"What happened?" But I stuck to my plan. Innocence was better than denial right? Right?

Placing his mug down, Daksh said with an amused smirk, "*it* happened."

He made sure to stress on the 'it' causing my cheeks to burn involuntarily.

Oh gosh... Not him too!

"Nothing happened!" I immediately groaned in reply. How was I, a delicate sole soul, going to stand against the four Grim reapers?

"Who are you trying to lie to?" Aaryan chuckled before continuing, "girls don't usually apply that much makeup on their necks."

If I wasn't a deep shade of red before, I surely was now. But still, to save my face I mumbled, "we do, we are girls. We do it all the time..."

I guess I either succeeded in convincing them that nothing happened the previous night or they had finally taken some pity over me. Both of the options are not at all the Raivardhan style. The dining room had succumbed in the silence making me sit down and start my breakfast.

"By the way, tone down your voices next time, your early morning activities just woke me up," Daksh suddenly said with a poker face that I ended up choking on the first bite of my toast and turning even more red than I already was. And surprisingly, it was possible...

Vikrant chuckled, "yeah, all those 'Ummm...'s and 'Ahhh...'s were just too..." He didn't continue further with an evil smile on his face. I found even Neel sniggering softly.

Gosh... Why didn't I just dig a hole and die in the room? Oh, the humble spirit of Earth! Please open up and swallow me alive because these guys were determined to embarrass me to death...

"Leave her alone, guys. She may faint from all the flushing she has done," Viaan's voice came to my rescue from behind before he put his hand around my bust and kissed the back of my neck. I gasped at his sudden gesture which took me by surprise.

"Gosh... Now they are going to be all lovey-dovey before us," Aaryan grumbled but I could see the smirk on his face.

Viaan just ignored his comment and asked, "want to go out to see the city? You didn't have the chance these last few days after coming here."

I looked at him in surprise, he was serious about it.

I felt a blush crawl up my cheeks again, "I would love to."

"Then let's go," he took me by my hand and we walked towards the door. It

was a beautiful feeling to walk with my husband, hand in hand. A bliss that felt so surreal without even knowing that these beautiful moments were his new anchor, out of the misery that he had buried in his heart for a *long* long time now.

39. UNCHALEES

As soon as we walked out of the main door, a valet stopped the car before us and got down. It was a fancy looking black two-seater convertible.

"Nice car!" I complimented as he got around to get into the driver seat.

The small up turnings of his lips indicated that he was pleased.

"BMW M6," he replied once I got into the passenger seat. I wasn't that stupid to not even decipher the 'BMW' part and understand that he just announced the name of the car for me.

"It's lovely." I looked above to feel the absence of the car roof. The sky looked beautiful and the promise of pleasant weather built hope.

"So where are you taking me?" I looked at my husband with an open smile.

Surprisingly, he reciprocated it as he replied, "wait and see."

Without much ado, he pushed the acceleration paddle and drove the car around the huge fountain followed by the long driveway before finally out of the gates. The song *Nashe se chadh gayi* by Arjit Singh played on a low volume in the background. It was already somewhere in the middle but then Viaan restarted the song before turning up the volume.

The cool breeze kissed my warm skin, erupting the tingles all over it. He drove the car smoothly around the light traffic and unfamiliar territory. Well, it was unfamiliar territory at least for me.

We entered the city that had buildings after building stacked over the hill like dominoes over the stairs. It looked so beautiful that I couldn't help but take all of it in with an awe! There were a lot of tourists scattered around the place as the car wheels rolled past them on the mantled roads.

We were soon out of the city and back into the wilderness of the mountain trees, driving uphill. The number of eucalyptus trees thinned as smaller shrub-like plantations came into view. They were all uniformly planted and cut, spreading magnificently like a green carpet over the slope of the hill. It didn't take me long to figure out that these were the famous tea plantations! This was a completely new experience for me because I had never been to the tea estates before and mind my words when I say that they were incredible!

"Our tea estates are a bit on the inner side to prevent much of the direct access," Viaan informed, his eyes flickered to me through the rear-view mirror and found a surprised expression.

"We have tea estates? Like freaking tea estates like these?" I whipped my head to look at my husband as I tried to absorb the news. It shouldn't be surprising but it was...

"Not just the tea estates but also a farmhouse, a tea factory and eucalyptus and teak plantations here," he added thoughtfully letting me know the property they owned around this city other than a freaking small palace!

I looked back at the tea estates completely mesmerized by them. Viaan didn't stop there but continued to drive, re-entering the wilderness of the other hill. I stood up holding the windshield to feel what it felt like to be the heroine of the cliché movies when riding a convertible car. It always looked so good in movies but here in the cold region with the freezing wind that hit me hard on

my face made it difficult to open my eyes, my teeth had begun to chatter making me immediately sit back down. Viaan only chuckled out loud when I sat back rubbing my hands and cheeks receiving a stink eye from me. But it never bothered him.

It's called a movie for damn sake Rynah! Did you think that you could pull off something that efficiently like you are a damn heroine? I rolled my eyes.

A comfortable silence had settled down between us.

Until I saw that little stream of water gushing through the rocks and falling over them like a miniature of a waterfall before flowing away in a narrow stream from under the tiny bridge over the road. It was just too cute!

"Viaan, stop here please!" I pointed at the tiny waterfall and exclaimed in excitement.

Viaan looked at me but didn't say anything as he pulled the car to the side.

I got down and headed towards the slab of stone that was placed below the waterfalls, where I could stand and enjoy its feel.

"Careful, Rynah. You just learned how cold it is out here," Viaan's voice floated over the song playing in the car before he killed the engine and got down. I carefully made my way over the soil towards the baby waterfalls when I replied, "come over here! It's so pretty! Don't you feel like getting closer to it?"

"Carefully, there is algae there which will be slippery over the slab—" he still hadn't completed his warning when my heel slid over the slab and I was on the ground with the cold water pouring all over me.

Gasping for breath in the cold and feeling shocked, I witnessed Viaan burst into laughter at my expense.

And all I could do was gawp at him speechless. He slowly made his way towards me still getting a hold on his laughter before kneeling on his one leg before my fallen structure but away from the waterfall. Even in this coldness, my cheeks burnt hot with humiliation and anger, making a cup with my hands, I collected handful of water and throw it at my cold-hearted husband, "you!!! You idiotic man! You should be helping me instead of laughing like that!" He laughed again as he tried to dodge the water that came flying towards him but my repeated attempt to get Viaan wet made his dodging attempts futile.

He reached out grabbing my hand as he pulled me up to stand with him, out of the falling water. His arm snaked around my waist and pulled me into his chest with. I gasped. Whatever area that was left dry on his clothes were now wet due to me.

I tried to pull myself away from his hold but he was just too strong, "Viaan, let go of me. Someone will see us like this!" I hissed looking around with the fear that any car may pass by us at any moment. We were beside a freaking road, for the love of the sweet god!

But he didn't oblige, instead, he wrapped his other hand around me pulling me flush against him, "let them."

I so badly wanted to wipe that arrogant smirk off his face.

And just as I had fear, a Toyota Innova moved beside our convertible. And the look on the faces of the south Indians who were sitting inside just changed from adoration to shock when their eyes switched from the car towards us. Their eyes widened and their mouths hung open. And I stood frozen in Viaan's arms with my mouth hanging low. Fortunately, the driver hadn't noticed us, else he would have driven the car off the cliff in shock...

As if that episode wasn't enough, another two cars followed soon after. The first car only seemed to contain bachelors who started to catcall and whistling

as soon as they sighted us. The driver of that car was slowing down but then the car behind them seemed to contain people with morals who scolded those men away before one of the passengers of the latter car shouted, "madam, are you okay? Is he troubling you?"

This time I bursted out laughing at the question. It was Viaan who deadpanned, "I am her husband."

The entire world knew who he was when we were married, thanks to the media but these people didn't seem to know anything about The *Viaan Raivardhan*.

Making a peace sign with his hand, the man signaled the driver to carry on.

Viaan grumbled something that sounded very much like, "way to kill the mood," before striding back to the car. I laughed behind him as I followed suit. They said karma is a bitch for a reason and this was one of those reasons.

It was sure turning to be colder as seconds passed by and being in a single layer of clothes wasn't very helping.

As soon as we sat inside the car, Viaan closed the roof and wound up the windows before turning the heater on. He stopped at the nearest tea stall that he found, ordering hot tea for two. I couldn't wipe out the grin from my face at his caring nature.

I was in desperate need of something hot to chase the coldness away. They had lit a small bonfire beside the stall where benches were placed and people sat around warming themselves. The view of the hills covered with the forest was a beautiful sight to witness from up here. It was just breathtaking to see.

I headed towards the benches to take in some of that warmth from the fire. The men around the bonfire stared at me, making me feel uncomfortable all

of a sudden by staring at me for too long but then I felt something draped over my shoulders covering my cold body.

Looking over my shoulder I found Viaan placing his blazer around me.

"It was in the car," he explained, handing me a glass of piping hot tea as he sat down beside me. I was engulfed with the feeling of safety and secureness. He made me feel protected and powerful. Looking up I found the men had looked away from one glance of Viaan's. I secretly dug my nose into his blazer inhaling his masculine scent deeply. I loved his faint smell in there.

Slowly sipping the tea, I smiled while having a light-hearted conversation with my husband. I learned that his favorite color was purple, surprisingly. He hated citrus fruits, loved seafood, was allergic to dogs and had completed his engineering from MIT. The freaking MIT! I just stared at him when he disclosed it to me and I had been taking pride in graduating from IIT when this freaking man had graduated from MIT...

How in the bloody hell did I end up being this lucky to end up sitting next to him? As his wife?

He laughed at my expression saying, "it's not that hard to get in there if you work out right from the beginning and know your stuff enough to prove it practically."

"By practically you mean?"

"Projects. Whatever you learn, you implement a project on it," he shrugged, swallowing the last sip of his tea.

"You forgot to mention something. Not just any projects but groundbreaking projects," I rolled my eyes playfully sipping the last of my tea.

He just chuckled as he replied, "it's the same old projects but with the

improvisation where this," he pointed at my heart as he continued, "thinks the project is failing to work."

I sucked in a breath at his touch. He laughed again, "come on my horny *Craziness*. We've got to reach somewhere."

He had just read me like an open book!

Blushing at his teasing, I followed after him and got into the car. The same song resumed from where it had stopped in the background as we continued to have that light-hearted conversation.

"By the way, where are we going now?" I couldn't help but wonder.

"Have you heard about Kanchenjunga?" He asked.

"We are going to Kanchenjunga?" I exclaimed in shock.

"No, no," he laughed, "we can make a trip over there some other time but for now we will be going to the Tiger Hill from where we can only see it. If we are lucky we should be able to see Mount Everest too," he explained.

"Wow!" I breathed out in sheer thrill, digesting the fact that if luck was on our side we would be seeing the tallest peak in the world.

He drove around for sometime before skillfully driving over an uphill rocky terrain, away from the road where other cars continued to drive but none dared to follow us.

I just loved how he showed the raw male alpha power and control over his car. With his sleeves rolled up to show his strong muscles flex as he changed the gear and steered the wheel. His veins visible through the skin of his hand making me silently admire them.

He stopped the car almost at the top of the cliff from where the snow-clad

peaks of Himalayas were visible. The clouds kissed them ever so lightly as the sun shined upon them making them glitter.

Together we sat in the car, relishing the beauty of nature after Viaan opened the roof again. We spent our time learning more about each other. He turned out to be a really interesting person with all the places he had been to, all the languages that he knew, all the experiences he had. Munching over a few Nachos, I listened to him opening up to me. Apparently, my husband had asked the butler to pack us snacks and lunch for the trip which was stuffed in the trunk.

I couldn't believe that he had worked as a bartender and barista in his uni days to pay his tuition. He and my other brothers-in-law had been in a band to snag some extra dollars at clubs and parties. And he made me believe that they were pretty good too. He used to play the keyboard and sometimes even sang. It was mostly Neel and Vikrant who were the lead singers.

We had just finished our sandwiches for lunch when we continued to exchange information about each other.

"Then why didn't you continue with the band?" I asked curiously.

"It was just something we used to do for a living. We liked it as a hobby but we weren't that passionate about it. It was just Aaryan who wanted to pursue his career in entertainment industry. Our goals were something else," he shrugged.

Putting my index finger to my chin, I tapped it, "I want to see you perform someday. I bet it will be amazing."

"I've lost touch and become rusty. I don't think you will be enjoying the out of sync notes being played," he chuckled, putting a nacho into his tempting mouth.

"And you are being humble over there."

"Aren't I always?" He turned to wink at me, making me roll my eyes playfully.

"Except the part where you try to act as if you can handle me." I tried to hide my smile while it was his turn to shake his head.

The sun was setting over the mountain ranges making a beautiful reddish-orange hue spread over the sky. We had spent hours together that afternoon. A comfortable silence had settled between us as we watched the sunset. I was still in awe at the scene.

"I always plan everything that I want to have in my life. But you, you were the only thing that happened to me out of my control," he suddenly said out of the blue, making me turn to look at him in surprise. His dark eyes glimmered with passion, his lips twitched into a tender smile. His face in the light of the setting sun looked even more beautiful than the Kanchenjunga and Mount Everest put together that we had spotted some time ago.

He turned his head to fix his eyes onto mine.

"How did I get so lucky to end up with you?" I whispered in awe.

"Guess, you were never meant for that old man or the other man who didn't realize your worth," his hand circled my waist as he gently guided me onto his lap.

"Because you were always meant for me." With that, his lips met mine in a tender kiss as his emotions poured out telling all the things that he had never said before. His fingers guided into my hair pulling me closer for an open kiss, I let my hands wind around his neck reducing the space between. His other hand caressed the skin of my waist, waking up my hunger for his touch.

His tongue entangled with mine, making me accept the dream like reality. I wanted to live in this moment forever but then time never stopped for anyone. We had to withdraw for air but ended up placing our foreheads together as we stared into each other's eyes. I couldn't believe that this beautiful creature was mine. He slightly pecked my lips again making me giggle.

Today was living a fairy tale. But I forgot that every fairy tale had a villain. A villain that didn't want to let the prince and his princess live 'their' happily ever after. But then again this wasn't a fairy tale but reality because we didn't have one villain but many...

40. CHALEES

By the time we reached home, it was a little after eleven in the night and I was slightly drowsy. The romantic candlelight dinner at a high-end restaurant was his other surprise for the day. We maintained playful mood throughout our dinner.

He laughed at how out of the scene I initially felt but quickly recovered like a pro to prevent him from feeling awkward because of me. I had thought that he hadn't realized it but then was there anything that could escape the eagle eyes of my husband? Guess not. It touched my heart that he was trying to make the day special for me, well even succeeded with flying colors.

Although it was my first time on a date but I could easily tell that Viaan was the most romantic man I had ever met.

The valets ran to open the doors of our car as soon as Viaan stopped it. Thanking the valet, I got down before walking towards the main door. Soon I felt the warm hand of my husband's on the small of my back as we climbed up the patio stairs in sync. I loved the way we fit together like the missing pieces of a puzzle.

We hadn't even properly entered the house when Aaryan rushed to Viaan and whispered something in his ear. The low murmurs that were exchanged had

made both of their faces harden. I couldn't hear anything from where I stood though I wanted to.

Viaan asked something to which Aaryan nodded and looked up at me smiling innocently as nothing had happened.

Viaan turned and walked out of the door again while Aaryan came to stand beside me.

"Where is he going?" I asked as my eyes trailed behind Viaan's departing form.

"Something came up. Why don't we go to my studio? I'll show you the new tune that I've composed for the upcoming album. I needed some input for it," he put his hand around my shoulder guiding me to the opposite side of the house that I had yet to venture.

Large rosewood open double door came into view through which Aaryan guided me inside. There was a grand piano on the side. Beside it were different types of keyboards opposite to the glass of the recording room, separating it from the control room. The red and brown carpets were put over one another on the ground like they still needed to be arranged properly but then Aaryan said that was his idea to make the room stand out. On the other side, there was a door leading to the control room. Beside the door from where we had come in, was a closet containing all sorts of instruments from drums to guitars to saxophone and all.

The area was covered in noise absorbers and speakers. Bathing in the different colored lights, the entire studio was light-themed just like the rest of the house. That made me wonder why had our bedroom been the only room which had a dark theme?

"Aaryan, why is my bedroom dark theme while the rest of the house is light themed?" I voiced stilling Aaryan momentarily from tuning his guitar.

Composing himself, he looked at me. Something dark and unfathomable in his eyes.

"You didn't ask Viaan about it, did you?" The grave tone of his voice shocked me for a second. It was for the first time that he had ever spoken to me like that.

I schooled my features to be indifferent and asked, "do I need to?"

"No!" The way he exclaimed it was like I had just told him that his puppy ran away, "don't ever bring it up before brother. It reminds him of the unfortunate events. Puts him back in the dark memories that he'd rather forget."

"What had happened, Aaryan? Does it affect him so much that you are reacting this way?" I tried digging in further.

"Yes, it affects him very badly on the inside that he remains distracted and silent for days together," Aaryan replied lost in a memory, his eyes distant and held pain. What was it that made this jovial Raivardhan all sad and serious? For some reason, it felt like it was about Aradhana.

"What's it about?" I tried prodding for more information.

He looked lost, trying to contemplate if he should be letting me into the secret or not. I tried encouraging him or even just to confirm my intuition, "if it's about Aradhana mom, both Asha mom and Viaan had a little chat about it."

"They talked about her to you?" I could say that the news had hit the heights of surprise for Aaryan's.

I shrugged a bit nonchalantly trying to not get too much into details to look like someone with partial knowledge, "yes, they told me about the events that had happened a long time ago..."

"Amazing..." Aaryan shook his head incredulously, really shocked for the first time right before my eyes.

"And why would they hide it from me when I have also become a part of this family. I'm the daughter-in-law here and I also think that it's my right to know," I felt proud about how calm and collected I looked at the outside but on the inside I was dreading of committing even a small mistake and lose my chance of knowing more about the truth behind the decors of my room.

"Makes sense," he mumbled to himself mostly but again didn't show any signs of answering the question, making me press on him again, "so...?"

Understanding that there was no way out of this situation for him, he sighed before telling, "Brother chose to mourn in that room for all those years whenever we came here. In the dark of the room, he hid his emotions from us. It has been impossible for him to forget how big mother was shot before his-" my eyes widened at his words as I exclaimed interrupting him, "shot!?!"

I remember Asha telling me that Aradhana met with an accident. Not even in the wildest dreams of mine had I thought that she was shot!

I realized the damage after that had been done. Aaryan stared at me wide-eyed as he realized that he just let out something to me which wasn't told before. Running his hand through his hair in frustration, he muttered profanities under his breath.

Anyway, the cat was out of the bag and he might as well fill me in with the rest of the information that I was missing.

"Why was she shot? How? When?" I fired the rapid questions at him but all he did was place the guitar down and swiftly walk out of the room. Nevertheless, I followed him out, calling out his name to stop him. But he didn't stop.

He almost jogged, making me run after him up the grand staircase before he disappeared behind the door of his room. I tried to open it only to realize that he had locked it.

This was the first time that Aaryan behaved that way surprisingly. What were the secrets buried in the chests of this family? How many of them?

I pounded at his door yelling, "you know I'm not giving up so easily Aaryan! You better spit everything out!"

But he didn't respond. Instead, I heard loud music blaring in the background making it difficult to hear over it. He was adamant to not breathe another word about it to me.

I waited for for some more time but he didn't get out of his room. Feeling dejected, I turned around and headed back to my room whose melancholious history had been brought to light. Now if I see, the room looked beautiful yet drenched in sorrow. My heart broke at the thought of Viaan spending hours together here in mourning.

I sat on the couch observing every single item of the room which I now saw in a different light, other than just some exotic expensive artifacts.

The sound of groans vibrated throughout my body causing my eyes to flutter open. I blinked in the darkness trying to adjust my eyes. Viaan's familiar smell, calmed me.

It took me a second to realize that I had fallen asleep. Blanket draped over my body indicated that Viaan had yet again carried me to bed after I fell asleep on couch. I felt his heat even before I saw him. He turned, putting his arm around my waist and letting me breathe out in relief.

Then he turned the other way and groaned in pain. That immediately got me sitting in attention. Did he get hurt somewhere? As if sensing my distress, he

mumbled in shock, "no."

I blinked at the telepathic incident that had taken place. Did he just read my mind? But the sweat that broke over his forehead and his quivering eyelids told me otherwise.

"No," he mumbled again in fear this time. And I didn't need time to realize that he was having a nightmare.

"Viaan," I slowly shook him but he began to thrash harder.

He groaned, "don't do it!" Making me blink my eyes again as I tried to decipher if he told that to me or just sleep talking.

"No, please," he sounded desperate.

"Viaan," I tried shaking him awake again, rougher this time around but then he shouted, "Maa..." He started awake and sat up panting for air. Whatever horrible dream he had, was still vivid in his eyes. I scooted near him to place my hand over his shoulder. Before I could ask if he was okay, he pushed the blanket away and got down the bed. Snatching his phone off the nightstand and he stood by the huge arched window, in the dark of the night. He placed the phone to his ear and let the silence be shattered by the dial tone. Someone picked it on the fourth ring and a low, husky, "hello," resonated through the air.

"Abhimanyu, Viaan here. I have news for you," Viaan spoke in his hoarse voice, making the other side go all quiet.

"*Raghav* got his bail," Viaan added, making this Abhimanyu suck in a breath audibly that even I could hear. Whoever this *Raghav* person was had disturbed the calmness of my husband and the other person on the other end of the phone.

"And we are coming," his announcement seemed vague to me but his next words cleared it up, especially when he looked over his shoulder at me adding, "to Cape Town."

Oh damn! We were going to South Africa! But what was it about this time? It wasn't for our honeymoon for sure. Only if I had known what was going to happen there... because it surely wasn't for our honeymoon...

41. IKTAALEES

I swallowed a mouthful of my chewed morning cereal as I continued to watch the men load the luggage into the private jet.

What? Don't mind me, Viaan hadn't let anyone have breakfast as he rushed us to the airport. And when I say anyone, it meant me, Neel and Viaan himself. He was very much in a hurry yet this crazy heart of mine skipped a beat whenever he was in my reach.

I hated the fact how Viaan had raised his walls up again and refused to confide his nightmare to me... I hated to see him go all cold and business minded again. Like how he was when we had initially met. It broke my heart.

His indifference was so evident that Aaryan's irrational self had ticked off. I couldn't help but remember the early morning encounter with the spoiled rock star.

I was still trying to make sense of what was happening and desperately trying to rid my eyes off the sleep when Viaan barked another order at the servants, "someone fucking wake Neel up!"

Leaving those poor souls to scramble to get his order done.

A soaked with sweat Aaryan walked out of the gym room, wiping his neck

with a towel as he witnessed Viaan open a door just to slam it shut behind him.

"Can't believe you asked him about it even after I warned you not to!" Aaryan fumed from beside me, fisting his hand into his towel.

I turned to look at him in shock. This was the first time that I had seen him angry.

"What the hell is wrong with you, idiot? Did you think that I'm so low to go hunting for secrets by destroying his peacefulness when I don't get it from the initial source?" I hissed, feeling pissed. Aaryan just stared at me like I grew another head.

"Imbecilic idiot's stupidity, I'll tell you," I added, fuming silently while Aaryan only blinked at me in shock.

"You just said the same thing in three different words, you know? Using their synonyms." He sounded calmer than before.

"No sheez, Sherlock. I know, because you are worthy of being called that," I replied before adding, "he woke up with a nightmare earlier this morning and has been behaving like that since then. Do you think I don't care about him after all that happened between us?" I exclaimed, throwing my hands in the air.

"Damn! Those nightmares again!" He muttered mostly to himself like he already had an idea about what I had informed him.

Aaryan cleared his throat scratching the back of his head, "sorry about that. It was rude of me to assume anything. It just pushes us to the edge whenever we see him in his shell..."

He looked genuinely apologetic about his behavior.

"Tell the manager to keep everything ready for our visit," Viaan ordered yet again sounding like he was back to normal but then there was a cold edge to his voice leaving behind a void in my heart.

Neel followed after him into the plane before the pilot pulled the door closed and headed to the cockpit where the co-pilot was waiting.

We silently took our places as the plane started to take off. We had to come back to Bagdogra to take our private jet.

The initial first few hours were silent as hell causing me to almost doze off. I was waiting for Viaan to break the deafening silence, well except if you counted out the sound of the engine that hummed lowly in the background. Even Neel did not try to make an effort to break this maddening silence. I don't even know how I spent the first half of the journey. Maybe by watching out of the window, watching a couple of movies continuously, hogging whatever food the air hostesses brought and making a small trip around the airports whenever there were refill stops. And the second half of the journey went with me letting myself into the blissful slumber for about the next eleven and a quarter hours. It wasn't like I didn't try to initiate a conversation but no one responded! And for the multiple times!

Before I decided to go to the cockpit and learn how to fly the plane or even engage the pilots into a distracting conversation that they would end up flying the jet into the nearest building, I chose to make myself comfortable enough to sleep on the couch.

I woke up to a gentle rocking movements. Opening my eyes in slits, I found the crisp white fabric before my face. And the familiar cologne hit my nose making my sleeping brain realize that my handsome husband was carrying me. Even though his face was expressionless and all cold, my heart couldn't stop beating fast. It might be because of him carrying me and being so close or just because of his thoughtfulness about not waking me up and carrying my extra weight to the car.

He was busy staring ahead like a man on a mission while Neel kept up with his fast pace on our other side, carrying what looked like my husband's expensive blazer in his hand along with his personal briefcase. Smiling gently to myself, I buried my nose into Viaan's shirt, inhaling deeply his tranquilizing smell before drifting back to sleep due to the jet lag that was already catching up with my first longest flight journey in my life.

The next time I woke up on a soft mattress. The duvets over me were tangled and pushed slightly till my waist. The sky outside was dark. My eyes looked around registering the beautiful yet unfamiliar decors of the room.

"That's so pretty," I muttered to myself, still halfway plunged into my drowsy self. As the sleep slowly drained away, I felt the panic setting in until a heavy hand wound around my waist pulling me flush against an all so familiar rock hard chest. I heard Viaan whisper in my ear with that deep hoarse yet calm voice of his, "relax babe, you are with me."

And all of a sudden everything inside of me relaxed as if there wasn't even any sign of a panic attack that was threatening to consume me.

Without saying anything else, I turned over and cuddled with him, enjoying his body heat and letting the slumber drown me back into itself.

"Rynah..." I opened my eyes to find Viaan's face hovering over mine as he stared at me. My heart fluttered at the sight of his handsome face. God, what good deed did I do to deserve this man? How in the hell did I end up getting so lucky to watch this face as the first thing when I wake up?

"You need to wake up now," he added huskily, placing a soft kiss over my temple. My insides melted just to be restored to melt again.

Damn! I so badly wanted him to cuddle with me some more!

I wanted to beg him to take me right there and then but I felt the

embarrassment of voicing it out yet again.

"For how long was I out?" Instead, I asked in my hoarse voice. My face was burning but fortunately, Viaan didn't say anything even if he had seen it. I felt my throat killing me with dryness.

"Almost as long as it takes to reach here from Darjeeling."

"And how long does it take to reach *here*?" I asked, raising an eyebrow at his vague answer. I don't know how but I was proud of how I could hide how much he affected me at the moment. Do cold showers work even for women? I guess I will have to find out about that soon.

He exhaled loudly through his mouth as if he was tired already, "About twenty-three and a half hours."

What the freaking hell!?! I was sleeping for an entire day!?!

"Yes, you were," his reply made me realize that I had said my thoughts out loud. And as if to agree with him, my stomach growled like a hungry lion's rather than a human stomach. Thank goodness, I hadn't mentioned about being aroused out loud else I would happily jump off the cliff...

"Come on, let's get something into your system," Viaan stated while getting up and pulling me along with him simultaneously. Taking that as a sign, I rushed for the shower. It didn't take long for us to freshen up, brush our teeth and get dressed. And surprisingly, the cold shower distracted me enough to forget about from being randy in the morning, especially, when the heat from the outside was almost killing me. I opted for a blue halter crop top and high-waisted light denim shorts.

On the other hand, Viaan looked unaffected in a white air mesh t-shirt and jeans paired with light leather shoes and a dark belt. Carrying a dark, almost blackish purple button-down shirt in his hand as we walked down the stairs

for a promising breakfast. It was strange to see him as him yet not *him*. He looked kind of lost and it broke my heart with the knowledge that he wasn't the Viaan I had come to know.

He looked vulnerable and exposed. Distant and lost. Like nothing was reaching him, through the walls he had around himself. Even though he tended to my needs in the morning and conducted a normal conversation with me behind the closed doors of four walls, in the privacy of our bedroom and the warmth of our bed, but as soon as we were out of the room, he had shut himself off. He hadn't talked to me at all after he suggested feeding me and that hurt my feelings.

Anyway, I let him be for now hoping he himself would let me help him vent out whatever emotions he buried inside. Neel had been out preparing whatever they were planning for the day, leaving only me and my brooding husband at the dining table having our authentic hash eggs with tea and bread.

We maintained silence the entire time. I couldn't help but look around the dining room, admiring it. The sixteen-seater dining occupied the space perfectly over the dark brown Persian carpet. I was able to see my face on the polished surface of the dark mahogany Oak wood table. There were entrancing designs drawn in gold at the borders of the table. Two chandeliers hanging above either end of the table, brightening the room beautifully. The house wasn't of the modern contemporary style like the one in Hyderabad but more on the royal theme, resembling the summer mansion in Darjeeling. The cream walls with the elements of gold and black decorated the entire home.

We had only finished with our breakfast when the maid knocked at the door announcing, "Sir, Mr. Malhotra is here."

"Seat him in the seating area, I will be there shortly," Viaan replied curtly and coldly, making me shiver.

"What should I do?" I asked to be on the safer side, not wanting him to grow colder than he already was.

"You can join me if you wish," his tone and eyes turned softer but his face remained emotionless. My heart skipped a beat at his reaction. I didn't need to be told twice as I nodded and followed him out to the seating area.

Sitting on a classic red single sofa was a handsome guy in his late twenties or early thirties. His hair neatly parted into schoolboy hairstyle. His facial hair carefully shaped to enhance his features. Though he was in a simple black t-shirt and a pair of jeans, he made them look better than a limited edition designer wear. Or was it a limited edition designer wear?

He stood straight as soon as we entered the room.

"Viaan," he greeted with a polite nod in his husky voice and an extended hand. Though he sounded manly nothing could be compared to Viaan's deep voice. It usually induced the shivers down my spine.

"Abhi," Viaan shook his hand before gesturing to him to take a seat.

"This is my wife, Rynah. And Rynah, he is my cousin, Abhimanyu Malhotra," Viaan introduced us, making us nod at each in polite greeting.

"So sorry that I hadn't been able to attend your wedding, I was busy tending to the emergency in the export sector," Abhi apologized but Viaan dismissed it.

"It's fine. Glad you were here to take care of it. It would have complicated the matters at hand if you hadn't tended to it."

"Now about Raghav..." Abhi trailed off casting a fleeting glance at me and gulping out loudly.

"I am here for that," Viaan mused as he asked, "did you do what I asked you to do?"

"Yes, the head of the news channel was more than happy to invite you over to their prime time," Abhi nodded his head, making me look at Viaan bemused.

"News channel?" I asked in a clueless tone, making Viaan look at me.

"Yes, a news channel. How good are you before the cameras?" He asked.

"Well... I don't know. I have never been to one before," I replied hesitantly feeling scared of facing a camera, where the entire world would be watching me. Even the slightest mistake would be humiliating.

"Then let's find it out this evening," Viaan answered stilling my heart for a whole second. Holly freaking molly! He was going to take me to an interview. A freaking news interview! I seriously hated his surprise department because he gives shocks rather than pleasant surprises...

42. BAYAALEES

The stylist fixed my hair for the umptieth time as I sweated away like a polar bear in the Sahara desert. It was a miracle how that happened in an air-conditioned room and another miracle was the people hovering around me like the bees around the queen bee, didn't wince at the sight of my perspiration.

And it wasn't like I was in the tropical regions like my home country, yet here I was sweating more than what I had in my entire time in Hyderabad. And mind my words, heat in Hyderabad is insufferable due to the lack of humidity in non monsoon months...

I was in a drilled and striped long-sleeve blouse upon a classic black pencil skirt. My hair pulled in a high ponytail and my makeup kept to minimal. If truth be told, I felt like the first lady. Powerful and beautiful.

My eyes found my husband and Abhimanyu sitting on the recliner corner discussing something with the editor. There were a pair of stylists hovering over them making the final touches for the camera, not that they needed it any way, yet they tended to it. We were waiting in the green room inside the news studio. The stage was being set.

I glanced at the notepad in my hand for the one last time to prepare myself for the questions that I was supposed to answer but nothing seemed to enter my blank brain. I was able to read but not understand. My nerves tingled threatening to morph into panic as my breathing accelerated for the second time in the last fifteen minutes. Any time now and we will be called.

The gentle knock on the door got our attention. And just as I feared, the assistant director stood by the door with an exam pad in her hand and a Bluetooth in her right ear as she nodded at no one in particular before looking up at us and announcing, "the stage is ready. Please follow me."

Viaan who was in a double-breasted navy blue blazer over a white shirt and white trousers got up, shortly followed by me and Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu wore a black blazer over a white woven t-shirt and black trousers.

Both the men were head turners and when two handsome men came together, a lot of drooling happened around. And so the same happen again, girls around didn't spare a chance to drool at what was mine, pissing me off incredibly. It was quite amazing to learn how I could be pissed off and nervous at the same time. But both the negative feelings subdued as soon as Viaan reached for me and placed his hand on the small of my back. He leaned over my side so that his lips were teasing the skin of my earlobe, creating shocks and tickles to travel down my body. I felt my pulse implode in my ear and my breathing accelerated.

"Take a deep breath and relax. If you feel overwhelmed or not able to answer anything they ask, just blink at me thrice back to back and I will take control of everything."

His voice and the breath created another shiver to trickle down my rigid spine but his words warmed my heart. I nodded at his words wholeheartedly, with a smile spreading on my lips.

Without wasting any second, Viaan slightly nudged me towards the door,

guiding me out of that terrible room. The assistant director who walked a few feet ahead of us directed us to the studio.

The decor of this place was quite classic like that of a multinational company. The white walls with the slight scent of lime in the air had me wondering if this was what the news agencies often looked like.

We entered the room where the studio was set. The whole setup was different from what I had anticipated. I was lost for quite some time in my admiration for it. The spotlights had covered the entire floor on the sides illuminating the whole stage. There were many small screens fitted together to form a big display on the wall behind the sofas which were in the middle of the room. The lady who had been sitting on the sofa in her prim and proper red skirt suit, stood up to greet us with a huge smile. Her caramel blonde hair tied into a perfect high ponytail letting her long straight hair reach down till her slim waist. She was truly a sight to behold, especially for men. Fortunately for me and her, none of the men accompanying me even bat an eyelid that way.

All three of them had been very professional. That was good, I suppose, because she did look very friendly. I had no idea about what I would have done if she'd show anything apart from professionalism toward Viaan.

And as far as I knew, Abhimanyu who had been recently married would absolutely not want to sabotage his relationship with his wife.

"I hope you are ready for the live broadcast," The blonde anchor, whose name was Gina, spoke after settling down on the sofa after us.

"Yes," Abhimanyu replied while Viaan just nodded his head curtly in reply.

While on the other hand, it was the cue for my stage fear and camera shyness to come back and cling to me like a baby monkey to its mother. Nevertheless, it dulled to an extent when Viaan's hand discreetly reached over my side to give mine a slight squeeze. He must have sensed my dread.

"We are going to go live in three, two, one," The cameraman announced before Gina started talking, "Welcome to Spotlight On The Trendsetters. Today we have the game changer, the dashing, brilliant business tycoon who made it to the Forbes yet again this year in the top ten businessmen of the year. None other than, Mr. Viaan Raivardhan along with his beautiful wife, Mrs. Rynah Raivardhan!"

I felt the camera zoom in on my face making me blush slightly.

"Another guest we have on the show along with us is the handsome gentleman, Mr. Abhimanyu Malhotra, the managing director of the ARAIV exports in South Africa," Abhimanyu smiled at the mention of his name.

"Thank you for having us on the show," Abhimanyu replied, making Gina smile and counter, "the pleasure is ours, on the contrary."

And just like that, the question and answer section started.

I must admit, she was completely charming on the set. No wonder it was one of the shows with the highest TRP.

It was all fine with me when all the focus was mostly on the guys with Gina just prompting me to add a comment here and there but never really making me the center of attention. The men knew how to keep the conversation smart and witty, making it even more entertaining to watch. Until my luck ran out.

Now the anchor turned her head back at me and said, "I want to ask you a personal question that many of the audience sitting at their homes personally requested."

I felt the nerves take over my entire being yet I managed to remain as composed as ever and nodded in acknowledgment.

She continued with her question, "most of us would like to know how you

both ended up together? Many of the single ladies still fancy the remaining Raivardhan brothers. So any particular tips from your side?"

Oh, that they would want to know, wouldn't they? And I had a feeling that saying 'getting held back as a hostage for three days by the Raivardhan brothers in the Raivardhan mansion, would do the trick' wouldn't be appreciated by my darling husband who was looking at me with an amused expression. So instead, I ended up saying, "just be yourself."

Yup, clumsy and misunderstood me did indeed play a real big role in getting where I was today...

"Definitely," Viaan added from the side. His lips curling into that annoying smirk of his that made me want to spill the truth but then, I had to choose my battles carefully and this, by all means, wasn't a battlefield I wanted to rage war on.

I resorted to a sickly sweet smile in my husband's direction letting this one slip away, for now. Yet, the crazy heart of mine couldn't stop beating at his playfulness in public.

"That's so cute what you guys have going on there with you. But right now, we will be taking a short break. Stay tuned to know more about what Mr. Raivardhan has to share," Gina announced, making the cameraman relax a bit as he stopped rolling the camera.

Gina huffed in relief, "that went well."

The errand boy with a tray filled with refreshments rushed towards us. His hands shivered a bit as he served us a bottle of juice and an eclair. While opening the cap of my juice bottle he accidentally spilled it on my skirt, much to Gina's chagrin.

"What the hell, Baron! How can you be so clumsy?" Gina bellowed at the

shaking figure of Baron's.

"I-I'm sorry. I-I didn't mean to do it," Baron quivered. Feeling pity over the poor fellow, I stopped wiping my skirt with the tissues that other staff members had rushed to aid me with and resorted to saying, "it's okay, accidents happen. I'll head over to the washroom to clean this up. You guys resume with the show."

I didn't wait for Viaan's permission, though I felt his gaze on the side of my face. Just as I was about to leave, a big rough hand grabbed my wrist making me turn and find Viaan looking at me with a somber expression as if asking me not to go. My heart accelerated with butterflies in my stomach. His sweet notion was enough to fill me with pure bliss. I just turned to flash his serious face with my best smile before slipping my hand out of his to get cleaned of this mess.

"I will be back soon," I whispered to him promisingly and turned around before he could talk me out of it.

Baron looked at me quite gratefully as I gave him an *everything-is-going-to-be-fine* smile and headed off the set while asking for the direction of the washroom and in fact, I even got assisted there.

The other errand guy who showed me to the washroom was waiting outside while I headed in to get the stickiness of the juice that had seeped through my fabric, off my skin. The mirrors reflected how impeccable my makeup was. It almost made me look perfect, like a porcelain doll. Too surreal.

I hadn't noticed it earlier due to my extreme nervousness. But now that I had, I wholeheartedly appreciate the makeup artists' hard work and my confidence boosted.

It didn't take me much longer. I eyed my handiwork in the mirror and nodded in approval before walking out of the door only to find an empty corridor.

Where did that errand boy go?

I was still busy trying to clear my bewilderment when all of a sudden, a giant hand covered my mouth and a small prick on my arm diverted my attention simultaneously that I was yet to react sensibly. I was too shocked and blank, still trying to understand what was happening when everything went dark as black dots appeared in my vision. And just like that, I was lost to oblivion. Unaware of what was waiting for me on the other side. The only thing that jabbed me was my promise that I had made to Viaan. And it broke my heart that I wasn't going to be able to keep it...

43. TAINTALEES

While I was forced into oblivion, Viaan discretely looked at his watch whereas Abhimanyu was busy answering the questions thrown towards them, becoming the center of attention. Viaan's eyes gave a quick scan around the room to spot the familiar sight of his wife, only to come up empty.

It was almost more than fifteen minutes and yet there was no sign of me.

Gina had only opened her mouth to ask another question when Viaan interjected, "Everything is as obvious as they appear over the media. Nothing has been hidden from you guys. May I get another glass of water please?"

Gina looked at Viaan with worry because that was their code for that show to stop airing due to any sudden emergency.

"Well, yes Mr. Raivardhan. That truly is a fact that we as media persons admire the most about your family. But right now, let's take a little break. We will be right back after this," She announced getting them the requested break.

"Everything alright, Mr. Raivardhan?" She asked out of courtesy.

"My wife, she hasn't come back yet," He resorted to a short reply. He already had a dreadful feeling when I had left the room but now it had only been amplified. Something was most certainly amiss around here and he wasn't ashamed to look arrogant to stop the live show in the middle to search for his wife.

"Günter, where is Mrs. Raivardhan?" Gina quizzed looking at a baffled looking errand boy who had escorted me to the washroom.

"I thought she had come back so I came here in search of her," He looked around.

"What do you mean by *you thought she came back?*" Viaan questioned rigidly making Günter explain that while he was waiting for Mrs. Raivardhan outside the washroom, an old man stumbled towards him catching his chest right above his heart and mumbling 'water' making Günter rush to the nearest water dispenser which happened to be in a studio down the corridor. By the time he rushed back the man fell before his very own eyes leaving Günter in a panic and making him help the old man to slowly sip the water from the glass. After drinking the water, a few guards claiming to be the old man's bodyguards came to his aid and took him away telling that they were going to take him to the hospital. In that chaos, he had forgotten about Lady Raivardhan until five minutes ago when he realized that she wasn't visible anywhere and he came searching for her.

Viaan let out a string of profanities as he called the head of the ARAIV guards on the duty that day and asked to search for his missing wife. Having no idea that I wasn't even in the building at the moment.

Everybody became anxious as they started to help Viaan in the same. Not even ten minutes later the head of the ARAIV guards came rushing to Viaan to deliver the news, "Sir, there is a little bad news. Mrs. Raivardhan has been abducted. We found this footage from the CCTV of the back door."

And just as the guard had informed, the screen of the laptop showed a black sedan standing in the distance and a bulky guy in a black shirt was carrying his unmoving wife, away.

"Whose car is that? What's the registration number?" The slowly simmering anger was now boiling in Viaan's veins which could be easily made out from the stony and chilling tone of his voice. The guards slightly trembled under his blood freezing gaze, "W-we don't know, S-sir. No other camera captured anything that could help us with this. They were really careful about everything."

Viaan felt like throwing the laptop on their heads as he boiled with anger. Who had dared to enter his territory and take his wife away? They had unknowingly signed their own death contract.

"I don't know anything, hunt down the security guards of this place, interrogate them. Ask them where they had died during this incident. Gather the staff and interrogate them. Check all the cars that had arrived and track them back to their owners. And if anything, any minute thing not falling in together, bring it to my notice. And call our best hacker, right now," Viaan roared the orders before punching the glass teapoy letting it shatter to the ground into tiny pieces of shiny fragments as he cursed, "damn."

He wanted to punch the daylight out of the kidnappers but he had to manage with the teapoy, at the moment. Leaving the guards to shiver at his anger.

"But our best hacker is Mr. Vikrant, Sir. What do we do?" One of the guards dared to ask, calling for Viaan's wrath onto himself.

"Then call him, you idiot!" Viaan shouted at the imbecile guard leaving all of them to scramble away to follow his commands.

Viaan couldn't help but remember the time he had shouted at the watchmen back in the Raivardhan Winter mansion for being irresponsible and letting an

opportunity for me to get in through the gates. He had thoroughly scolded those poor fellows, enough to have their knees shaking. That day he had scolded them for letting me in and today he was scolding the security for letting me out, or rather being taken away. How ironic was it that the situation had taken this kind of twist? He had never even thought that he would be caring about a careless girl who he had concluded to be a clever, gold digger. Only now did he know that I was anything but that and perhaps much more.

"Sir," Viaan's chain of thoughts was broken by a guard standing before him.

"We have some progress," He added, making Viaan nod before he continued, "that errand boy Baron, he was involved in this."

Viaan had a hunch on that nervous wreck errand boy, so it wasn't particularly surprising. But what the guard said next was, "and this was sent for you."

Viaan eyed the metal part of the small pen drive before nodding at the laptop.

The guard didn't waste any time and immediately inserted the pen drive and played the video in it. It chilled the air further as the video continued on the screen. Without another word, Viaan launched from his chair and stalked toward the exit. Gritting his teeth all along.

Another one of the guards rushed after him, "Sir, Mr. Vikrant is in an important meeting it seems and his assistant isn't allowing further communications."

He grunted in annoyance ordering, "get Abhimanyu to handle things over here," before dialing the number of his nearest brother as he rushed through the corridor. Neel didn't take much time to answer it.

As soon as he had spoken a "Hello" on the receiving side, Viaan spoke, "they took her away. They took Rynah away right from under my nose!"

"What!?!?" Neel was shocked to say the least.

"Get Vikrant on the call and set up the clone device to let him remote access to the systems here. Let him hack into the cameras of every single stoplight and track the route of this car I'm sending the video of. And stay in touch with me the entire time," Viaan barked into the phone. Neel hadn't waited for him to finish his ordering but had rather started with doing the same as they came. He was already moving towards their cyber room at the end of the hall in their Cape Town mansion while dialing for Vikrant from his work phone.

Apparently, the video Viaan had received on the pen drive was the video of the car from another angle where the car's registration number was clearly visible and the route it had taken next. Ordering the guards following him about what else to be done, Viaan had also ordered for the assemblage of the alpha team in the area and a group of about twenty people had appeared out of nowhere.

On the other side, no one had an idea about what was going to happen. Especially me...

The darkness swallowed me when my eyelids slowly raised. The warm and sticky air started to suffocate me already. My breathing had slowly morphed into ragged. Panic flooded my system. What scared me more was the realization that I couldn't react. I couldn't even lift a finger, let alone move my body. I didn't know why my body felt numb and heavy while my head was dizzy. My vision blurred on the edges making me so badly want to throw up.

A lone tear slipped from the corner of my eye before they were shut close again on their own accord. The slumber overpowered my will.

A little more sleep couldn't be so harmful, right?

That was where I had been wrong. When I next opened my eyes, I was lying

on an unfamiliar bed and when I tried to move, I still couldn't. My brain started to focus on the surroundings rather than the emotions that were threatening to burst out of me. My habitual panic after waking up in new places alone, threatened to take over me.

By some miracle I hadn't already gone into a frenzy of palpitations and trepidation. Perhaps it was the drug that they had given me that kept me calmer than usual. Yet, it wasn't enough.

I still couldn't feel even my fingertips, it was so numb and that was the reason that I started to freak out. The drugs might have been wearing off because the new surroundings had started to give me palpitations. The only thing I wanted to do was get back home, I wanted to go home to my family so badly.

I was scared. In fact, I was terrified.

The movement on my right caught my attention, my vision still blurred from the drowsiness but the silhouette looked oddly familiar. My brain kept chanting like a mantra, *'be brave, do not under any circumstances let the other party know how badly he was affecting me'* but my facade of bravado couldn't stop tears from escaping.

My tongue rolled around with difficulty, slurring my words, "W-Who... are... you?"

Only to hear the words that chilled my spine. Or rather it was the familiar voice and the creepy tone.

"Oh my darling, I have waited for such a long time to have you. But now, now you are exactly where I want you to be."

That voice gave rise to goosebumps all over my skin but the sight that came before me was even more soul-crushing.

Out of the shadows came a man whom I had never imagined to be able to do such a thing. But he had, surprisingly. His protruding belly made him look like he was six months pregnant but then again I had to remember that he was a man, that too an old man to even have that as a possibility.

He slowly came to sit on the bed beside my limp body and brushed his hand against my hair like he was taming them. And why not? When he almost didn't have any left as his own... I felt disgusted and wanted to crawl away but unfortunately, I wasn't able to. Still, it didn't prevent me from dry-heaving but he seemed to have ignored it.

"You know, everything was going perfectly. Just as I had planned. I let no other suitor, eligible enough to marry you, approach you even from miles away. Because you were only for me. I've waited more than a decade to marry you," He became bolder and traced my cheek with the back of his fingers. I flinched at his touch but again he seemed to have ignored it.

"Even if Viaan hadn't married me, Ravi would have. I wasn't going to marry you," I said, feeling elated that my verbal ability was back to almost normal, "Mr. Surya Kant Nath."

44. CHAVAALEES

As soon as I said his name, Surya Kant Nath smiled that creepy smile of his as if none of my words affected him. He combed his fingers through my hair like he had been doing that for a long time like it was an old habit of his.

"That is where you are wrong, my sweet, sweet Rynah. If that Raivardhan bastard hadn't stepped in to ruin all my plans, you would have been carrying my child by now," I would have shuddered in disgust at his words if another word hadn't caught my attention.

I asked him, unable to hold it back, "what plans?"

Though he had mentioned the same before, I was too busy getting disgusted by him to focus on anything else. But now, I hadn't missed it.

"The plan of making you mine. You know how hard I had worked on it?" He pouted as if I was going to let out an 'aww' for him and praise him for whatever dirty work he had done.

"Like?" I challenged him just to ruffle his old feathers some more.

"Why, I never let any suitor even consider you to be available! I had appointed a man just to keep an eye on your household and report me about

any eligible bachelor's interest in you. Then, I would seek them out separately, either make them understand that you were mine or divert their course to some other girl. Sometimes even get the guy beaten up if he was stubborn. I cannot let them have the fruit of the tree I have been guarding now, could I?

"I still remember when you were in your SSC and for the school trip you had visited my brother-in-law's resort, I had made up my mind to marry only you right there and then. I kept tabs on your family and followed you to Hyderabad. I would have married you a long time ago if your parents would have been a little more cooperative. But they wanted their daughters to graduate and I was like '*fine, let them fulfill their wish before fulfilling mine*'. But no! They had to go around searching for a groom. While keeping my proposal on hold. I was still okay with it but then that imbecile Ravi popped out of nowhere."

He stopped his rant to grit his teeth and I didn't disturb him because, to be honest, I couldn't. I was so shocked that I had lost my ability to speak at the moment.

Surya Nath continued, "I had dropped by your office only to check out if you were involved in any affairs I should be handling, so how wouldn't I plan to remove this barrier named Ravi? I learned that the rock star Aaryan was a big time flirt and a playboy, no one would question him and at the same time doubt any story that involved him. And using the office scandal along with your disappearance to achieve my purpose, wasn't it a clever move? My man had been keeping an eye on you and was smart enough to extract enough information about you being a suspect of a theft for the Raivardhans.

"Everything was playing in my favor. I just had to fill Ravi and his family's ears and all was fine, which I did. And I got my expected result. I was sure that Raivardhans wouldn't marry someone they classified as a thief or someone below their social standards, but then again I had never seen them

as a threat, especially Viaan Raivardhan!"

My stomach clenched as his words kept spilling out.

"I don't understand, he why would marry you when he couldn't even stand the sight of you?" He exclaimed, making me ask, "how did you know that he couldn't stand the sight of me?"

He snorted, "his reputation, his arrogance, the way he treated you in the office, they holding you captive, the Nishika Raichand affair. It was as clear as day even for a blind to see that he had no interest in you, making me lower my guard and my hunch had proved right at the event night when he himself handed you over to me telling that you missed me." His hand caressed my cheek.

"I had almost given up my hope but that night I knew nothing was going on between you two and he would obviously not mind if I took you away."

I almost cried out of dread at his words. Only if he knew what I and Viaan had progressed to be, he would have caught some flames and burnt into ashes right before my very eyes. That would be really a sight to see but I felt the need to waste his time before he did anything drastic. All I could hope was that Viaan would have realized that something was terribly wrong by now and was working to find me.

"So it was you who tarnished my reputation in the eyes of the people?" I got my lips to speak as confidently as I could.

"Don't think like that, my love," I swear I felt the bed bounce a bit on my cringing at his endearment, nevertheless he continued, "I did it so that I could restore your reputation as my queen. Someone had to be a bit smarter to get the treasure from the crazy rat race. And I was the one who placed the treasure in a spot unreachable to other-" I interjected adding, "by bringing shame to my family," but nothing seemed to have mattered to him as he

continued without paying any attention to it, "the only key was to wait patiently till your parents come back knocking at my doors. And it almost happened if those Raivardhans hadn't meddled with my business. But no worries, everything is going to be as it should have been. I have you here with me and that good for nothing husband of yours must be busy with that stupid interview. You must admit, wasn't it a clever move to grab you when they least expected it?"

"Well, it was," I hoped my sarcastic nod didn't look overdone.

"But how did you know that we were going to have a press interview when it was on such short notice?"

"I have my ways," His proud smile made him look even more of a grandpa than he was. Sensing that I wasn't buying his excuse of an answer he added, "I ain't that powerless before these Raivardhan kids. I have my own connections and my own techniques to get my job done."

He had just finished with that sentence when the loud bangs went off in the area making me jump in the process as well it made my heart feel like it had jumped into my throat beating furiously in there.

"What was that?" Nath mumbled the question buzzing in my head to which I eerily had an idea for an answer. Getting up, he called out, "Jimmy! Jimmy!"

A scruffy guy in black shirt and trousers walked in with a gun in his hand, "yes Sir?"

"What was that noise out there?" Nath enquired wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

Wasn't someone losing his shit already? I smirked at my thought.

"Don't exactly know, Sir. Francis has gone down to check it out. He'll radio

me," Jimmy shook his hand showing off his walkie talkie in it.

And as if on cue, the buzzing in the walkie talkie grabbed our attention. Jimmy pressed a button calling out, "this is Jimmy four two oh eight, requesting for an update on the situation. Francis, what was that noise?"

Except the buzzing nothing could be heard for some time making Jimmy repeat his question, "gosh man, what in the hell was that sound?"

In the reply came a loud thud followed by an ear-splitting high frequency screechy noise, making us all cover up our ears before it was all gone. Everyone looked at each other's faces in anticipation because one thing was for sure that something had gone horribly wrong or perhaps in this case terribly right. My heart thundered in my chest and I did not doubt that it was the same with these two men in the room.

Not even a few seconds later, the buzzing came again making Jimmy call out again, "Francis? What was that sound?"

The sound of someone's breathing came through only to increase our anxiety before a reply in a familiar deep velvety voice rolled in a calm, cold tone replacing the churning of the nervous energy with fearlessness before the walkie talkie was silenced again, "that was the sound of your death on its way."

Guess, my guess was right. That was my Viaan coming for me.

45. PAINTAALEES

Viaan finished instructing the alpha team when his Bluetooth tinged indicating an incoming call. Pressing the receiving button, he said, "hello."

"Vikrant here. I heard about the situation and I am already into the system of traffic management," the voice of the other brother informed. It wasn't the first time that he had hacked into a government facility. So, he had a pre-made algorithm that he just modified a bit to suit his needs. Basically, it was merely a child's play to him.

"And I just received the associates in the kidnapping. I'll let you know what I find out from them," Neel's voice added, notified that the discussion was going on the conference call.

"Viaan, I found the car. Arranging the frames from different stop lights in the timeline," Just upon hearing that, Viaan signaled his alpha team to get into the vehicles while he hopped onto a BMW HP4 which he had borrowed from Abhimanyu. With the black helmet on his head, the coordinates entered into the GPS in the bike and that was all he needed. With a single powerful kick, Viaan ignited the beast under him letting its rich, deep roars echo through the alley. Accelerating it once with the brakes held, he accelerated it twice to check its strength before letting the brakes go, and swift like the wind, he

raced down the streets.

Following the blue line on the GPS, he took a skillfully sharp turn making the bike bend at the forty-five degrees angle before overtaking the cars moving slowly on the road. Driving the metal beast in a zigzag motion, he gave a fright to many but he didn't give a damn about it. As his blazer flew behind him like a cape, he was soon out of sight of the alpha team that followed him in the SUVs. The bike was really fast but still not fast enough for him, what would have roughly taken about an hour, he had reached twenty-five minutes prior, not to forget that he had skipped all the stoplights. A gamble with his life but he didn't care.

In fact, he never did...

It had sort of become like a regular chore to him, just with a different purpose every time. He stopped at the start of the fork in the road since the coordinates stopped there.

"Where from here, Vikrant?" He asked in the Bluetooth.

"Just a minute," Vikrant mumbled, furiously typing over the keyboard.

"I'm hacking into the system of that registered car. These people have insane security. Remind me to buy one of their cars later," Vikrant added to ease Viaan's anxiety.

"There, I'm sending you the new coordinates. There should be our man," Just as Vikrant completed his sentence, Viaan's phone buzzed indicating the new message. Without further ado, Viaan entered the new coordinates and raced off to the location. He still had to cover about a few hundred meters more when he encountered the gates of a farmhouse. There were two armed guards at the gate making him recalculate his strategy. Instead of stopping by the gate, he rode further down the road on his right till he was out of sight but stopped next to the compound where there was tree peeping from behind.

He let his eyes wander around the street to spot the security cameras or any other person watching him, which were none, before he looked at the six feet tall compound, nearly his height, and checked to see if it was electrically protected by any chance. To his luck or rather mine, there was no electric fencing. He took a few steps back before running the little distance to give himself a boost before jumping to grab onto the top of the wall and hoisting himself up. It wasn't difficult for him to do it since it was his usual to do pull-ups in the gym everyday.

The tree had hidden his muscular frame as well as provided him the perfect spot to scout the entire area out. Apart from the guards at the gate, two more armed guards were patrolling around the lawn. Once again, his eyes looked around for the CCTV cameras to find none. It was as clear as day that this place was meant to conduct illegal activities without the fear of setting a trap for themselves by installing the security cameras.

Viaan sat there like a powerful feline, watching the pattern of the guards' patrolling with respect to the ticking of the seconds on his watch. And just when he was sure that he had it figured out, he jumped down the tree to hide in the bushes below to proceed with his plan.

One of the guards caught the glimpse of the action and signaled his partner about something going amiss among the bushes. And both of them raised their guns as they slowly walked towards the rows of flowering bushes planted near the compound wall. They were almost near the first line of the plants when Viaan raised from his hiding spot delivering a swift and strong spin kick, knocking both of their guns out of their hands simultaneously. Before any of the guards could comprehend what was happening, Viaan caught the nearest guard in a headlock before wringing his neck in a swift movement and letting his body fall limp.

The shock from the second guard quickly faded, making him spring into action by trying to throw a few punches in Viaan's direction. The keyword

being *'trying'*. Because Viaan easily dodged the first two punches before blocking the next few and finally giving back a few of his own. Unlike the startled guard, Viaan had calculated every move of his and struck a damaging blow on the guard's neck, leaving him completely vulnerable and leading him into a coughing fit.

Relaxing into his dignified stance, Viaan walked up to the guard before kneeing the face. The guard was down in less than a second. Viaan removed the helmet and dropped it by the unmoving guards before walking towards the door. The main door was locked. So, he looked around and found the sliding door of the balcony on the first floor slightly ajar. He glanced around to see if there were any more guards while shrugging off his expensive blazer and rolling up the sleeves of his white shirt.

He climbed over the sill of the lower window before grabbing its lintel and hoisting himself up. With a single jump, he grabbed the railing of the balcony and pulled himself up and over it. Sliding the slider slowly, he entered the room by crouching against the wall. Not before pulling out his trusted pistol with a silencer, which had been tugged away on his back, in the waistband. He had it picked up from his car right after he learned about the situation.

Peeping through the glass in door, he pulled the door open when the guard walked past him just to grab him by his neck and pull him inside. With a swift twist, he rendered the guard unconscious and dropped him on the tiles. Stepping over his unmoving body, Viaan walked out to find another guard who was staring at him in surprise from the other end of the corridor.

As if coming out of his trance, the guard pulled out the gun asking, "Hey! Who are-" But before he could complete the sentence, Viaan raised his gun and fired at the guard's shoulder causing him to drop the gun without the safety lock, crying in pain.

The gun automatically fired in loud bangs on every bounce it had. One of the bullets had just missed Viaan by a few millimeters but he remained calm and

unfazed. Except for cursing at the unintentional alert that he had given others. Not that it hadn't burned a hole in his expensive trousers, but he again didn't care about those minute losses.

The sounds of the footsteps made him raise his head to spot a few guards running up the stairs to stand before the injured guard. Without wasting the time, he threw a metal artifact from the side table up in the air before tornado kicking it towards the approaching guards. And soon after he ran towards them.

The guard in the front was hit by the metallic artifact in the head, causing him to stagger back and becoming an obstacle in the path of others. Viaan kicked off the wall to jump in the air before delivering a powerful punch to the first guard who reached him before grabbing the same guard by his neck for support as he lifted his body into a horizontal momentum to strike the next one with both of heels on the guard's chest, leaving him to stranger back coughing vigorously.

Viaan crouched down carrying the first guard on his back before rolling over to throw him at his colleagues. Lifting the side stand, Viaan smacked it on the other guard's head before raising his leg to deliver a spinning hook kick to the fourth guard's neck. Straightening up, he eyed the defensive position of the remaining guard with a bleeding nose before getting his own hands into a fighting position. The guard let out a war cry like an amateur he was and ran towards Viaan.

With his years of training in the martial arts, this was a pathetic joke in Viaan's eyes. Nevertheless, the hefty guard had succeeded in grabbing Viaan by his collar and throwing him in through an unlocked door, which had burst open due to the force and weight. The room was still being set up with empty walls and white sheets covering most of the items and a few mirrors standing around idly. Viaan got up from the floor resuming his defensive stance while the guard mirrored it with his own.

There was a slight buzzing from the walkie-talkie which the guard carried. Followed by the voice of another comrade of his asking, "this is Jimmy four two oh eight, requesting for an update on the situation. Francis, what was that noise?"

There was a contemplating look on the guard's face because he had learned not to underestimate the man before him, especially when his opponent knew the martial arts and he himself didn't even know even an 'M' of the 'martial arts'. He was more of a boxing dude. An amateur boxing dude who had recently joined the club.

"Gosh man, what in the hell was that sound?" the question from the other side repeated in other words when the guard had failed to answer the first time.

The guard hesitantly picked the device up and clicked the button to answer but before he could say anything Viaan executed a jump triple sidekick, causing the guard to stagger back, dropping the walkie on the ground. The guard unexpectedly caught Viaan's leg when he had tried to deliver a front kick. Jumping on his other leg, Viaan swiftly executed a crescent kick and knocked him out cold in a single blow.

Dusting off the invisible dust off the clothes, Viaan picked the walkie talkie which had accidentally pressed the button. Not even a few seconds later, the Jimmy guy from the other side asked again, "Francis? What was that sound?"

Viaan held the walkie talkie close to his mouth, the button pressed for the other side to hear while he listened to the alpha team updating him about their status. They had taken down the remaining guards on the gate and the lower floor. That left only the second floor where I was kept.

He breathed out in composure before delivering the message to the man who had kidnapped me, "that was the sound of your death on its way."

46. CHHIYAALEES

There had been pin-drop silence in the room. I doubt that the two men in the room would have even dared to breathe in the last few minutes.

It looked like they had died on the spot or turned their bodies into statues upon hearing Viaan's voice. Well, their loss. I didn't ask them to kidnap me and sign their own death certificates. The numbness had slowly started to fade away and allowed me enough control over my body to push myself into a sitting position.

"Looks like you are an old man after all. A perverted, pedophilic, disgusting, reckless and powerless old man, before the Raivardhan kids." I let a cynical smirk spread across my lips as I watched the two swines sweat fearing for their lives.

Call me sadist, I certainly don't mind but to tan this bullheaded Buffalo's skin and use it like my carpet for a reminder, sounded equally tempting. Especially after hearing what all he had permitted himself to do with me and my family.

"You, come here," The Jimmy boy pounced forward grabbing my upper arm as he pulled me up from the bed and forced me towards the door.

I almost fell forward like a drunkard, with the wobbly steps. My strength

hadn't fully regained yet, leaving me still quite vulnerable.

"Careful with her," Surya warned, making Jimmy snap, "you idiotic son of a bitch! You had to go after her and risk everyone's lives? I don't know about you, but she is my ticket out of here."

We hadn't even stumbled the quarter way through the corridor when the footsteps grabbed our attention. Not long after that, a group of people in black uniform had accumulated before us, led by my husband. The guns were pointed in our direction while one of the guns was held against my head by Jimmy. He was only slightly taller than me so he wasn't completely visible to the people before us.

"Weapons down," Jimmy barked with a hint of fear. When none of them showed any sign of following the order, Jimmy grabbed me by my neck and pressed the gun to my temple harder, "I said weapons down, now!"

Viaan raised his hands in a surrendering manner making all his team follow suit as they slowly bent down to keep their guns on the ground. Before anyone could react, a loud bang went off leaving everyone frozen. Something splashed on the sidewall as Jimmy's grip slackened over me as he fell back. Blood poured onto the ground from the side, coloring the light colored carpet. I felt my heartbeat quicken as a shriek escaped my lips. Looking up I found Viaan lift his face with a shocked expression shouting, "Rynah! Get out of there!"

Even before I could process the words or get my panic-struck body to move, another arm snaked around my waist pulling me flush against the belly of the cigarette smelling body. Surya placed the gun on my temple, "I don't think I will need to give another demo about how well I can use this gun. Now, I will only say this once kid, send your guards into that room."

Viaan nodded at the guards, making them open the door of the aforementioned room and walk inside.

"Close the door and lock it," Surya threw a key towards Viaan which he caught in the air and followed the order.

"Viaan," I let a tearless sob bubble out of my mouth making him look at me, "Viaan, he did all those things."

I knew my sentence was ambiguous but Viaan nodded his head replying, "I know. I know everything that he has done. I have known for some time now. Aaryan did a fabulous job I must admit."

His words made me wonder when had Aaryan accomplished such a task?

As if understanding my unasked question, Viaan answered, "on the way to Darjeeling. He took the road to investigate Ravi and other people."

My lips formed an 'oh' in understanding. No wonder Aaryan had been so reluctant to talk about it. They wanted to keep it a secret.

"But I hadn't thought that *he* would dare to execute such a plan even after knowing that you are mine," He added further stressing on '*he*'. There wasn't any need to be clear about who Viaan was talking about, *Surya Kant Nath*.

"She was never yours!" Surya yelled from behind making me flinch, "I've been chasing after her for about a decade and you think that you can swoop in between and take her away from me? That's never going to happen!"

"You are an overconfident imbecile, you know?" Viaan's calm tone sent shivers down my spine.

"You couldn't do a thing when we just knew each other. But now that I love her, you think I will stand by and let you do whatever you want?" Viaan's words made butterflies flutter in my stomach.

He loves me! He said he loves me!

Viaan's eyes met mine and he nodded his head ever so subtly. For the first time, there weren't any words needed. I understood his thoughts, his mind, his *plan*.

Summoning whatever strength I had, I pushed Surya's hand that held the gun towards the roof and brought down my heel heavily onto his foot for a better chance. Surya had accidentally pressed the trigger, letting the gunfire towards the ceiling and scaring the hell out of me but none of it affected my courage that my husband had filled me with. I felt undefeatable and powerful in Viaan's presence and that was very much enough for Viaan to take over.

He rolled over the ground, grabbing his pistol, he shot at the arm of Surya rendering him to drop the gun and stagger backward crying in pain before Viaan ran over to deliver a snapu swipe kick knocking the daylight off Surya Kant Nath as he fell on the ground. I had collapsed on the floor without any strength. Viaan walked up to me and sat down wiping the tears that were rolling down my face. The tears of joy. He had found me! And he loved me!

Not wasting another second, I grabbed his collar and pulled him into a kiss which he responded hungrily. His arms went around my waist pulling me closer and mine snaked around his neck, letting my fingers run through his silky soft hair. I must say that he was soaked in his sweat. The body heat of his seeped through my clothes.

The breaking open of the door made us pull away and look at the alpha team pouring out into the corridor.

I was exhausted, to say the least. I let myself sink into Viaan's chest, looking around lazily. Men in blue uniforms marched in. Following them was Neel with two more men in suits who carried the briefcases.

Viaan slowly got up, pulling me up along with him as he asked, "all set?"

"Yes. Every single one of them is being dragged away to the station. The

company these guards belong to is being called for an interrogation," Neel informed before turning towards the inspector and pointed at the unconscious Surya before saying, "that's your guy, officer. Take him away."

"It's finally over," I exhaled looking at the scene before me.

"Not quite yet," Viaan whispered before looking towards Neel, "What happened with the Rathore case?"

Neel exhaled in exhaustion before replying, "he died due to a stroke during the trial. As a consequence, the trail was abated with no heir to proceed. We kind of won, indirectly though," Neel shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Viaan closed his eyes as if it pained him to hear it and exhaled out loudly shaking his head.

"Not quite yet," Viaan looked at the officers running in and out of the place leaving both me and Neel puzzled.

"What do you mean?" I asked and the only reply we got was, "follow me."

We needn't be told twice. Viaan gently dragged me through the corridor by supporting my weight, then down the stairs and finally out of the main door. To be honest, it was kind of suffocating inside but now I could breathe again.

The guards from the alpha team saluted at our sight making the brothers nod in acknowledgement.

We hadn't even walked out of the gate when a black SUV came to stop before us. The driver hopped down leaving space for Viaan to climb in. But before that, Viaan opened the backdoor, helping me climb into the backseat, only then did he hop into the driver's seat with Neel riding shotgun.

The engine purred softly as Viaan drove through the roads. Neither Neel nor I dared to question him at the moment, letting the silence reign between us for

some time. But just for some time.

Because I couldn't keep the pounding questions down in my head anymore, "what is this about, Viaan? Where are we going?"

I had just completed the questions when his phone went off. Pressing the answer button on the car's stereo, he let the voice of the caller boom through the speakers, "Hello, I have got the location."

There was no doubt that the voice belonged to Vikrant.

"Neel, enter the coordinates into the GPS," Viaan ordered, making Neel immediately react and obey. He entered the coordinates as Vikrant dictated. It hardly took about ten minutes more for the journey, leaving everyone in anticipation and before anyone knew it, Viaan stopped before another farmhouse. The tension was thick in the air.

Exhaling loudly, Viaan turned to look at the gate of the farmhouse and said, "here is the mastermind of this entire episode."

And just like that, the rapid pounding of my heart returned. Behind these walls was the enemy who had caused us so much trouble. The one who had added to our already existing difficulties. The one who had gotten away for so long but not now. Not anymore.

47. SAINTAALEES

We got down and walked towards the gates where two Indian security guards were stationed.

I regained enough strength to stand and walk on my own.

"Hey! Stop right there! First state who you are and your purpose for visit before we ask for permission to let you in," One of the guards yelled.

"I'm an attorney," Neel flashed his ID to the guard before adding, "you better let us in now if you don't want to get into trouble."

"I don't care who you are. I am not going to let you in without permission," The guard argued. Viaan rubbed his temple moving towards the guard before slapping him hard on the face, once and then again. Neel pulled him back before he slapped some more sense into the man.

The guard shivered with one hand on his cheek as he watched Viaan with wide eyes.

"Try that again and I won't hesitate to get your license canceled," Viaan spoke in that calm tone of his, never even once raising his voice to threaten.

"Or perhaps shoot you," I added with a shrug making the eyes of the guards grow even wider. Feeling the eyes of Viaan and Neel on me, I defended

myself, "what? Don't you have a fetish for guns?"

The sound of the metal gate opening caught our attention, making us look at the other guard opening it wider before standing up straight and saluting in our direction.

Casting another warning glare towards the former guard, Viaan walked inside with us in tow. The front lawn of the house was huge, huge enough to consider the inhabitants as big shots but not as powerful as Raivardhans.

Viaan didn't hesitate to push the main door open and walked inside. The servant who was carrying a bottle of champagne stopped to look towards us in bewilderment, making another Indian guard who was standing a few feet away look at us simultaneously.

"Hey! Who are you? And how did you get in?" He was walking towards us but the men just ignored him as they pushed him out of their way to enter the living room and stand before a startled looking Mr. Raichand. The limit of my surprise hit the sky.

"Raivardhans, what a pleasant surprise." Well, his voice and expression told us otherwise. He was shocked, not even nearly enough to be pleasant. And scared. Definitely scared.

Wearing their regular masks of poker face, Viaan and Neel sat down on the couch opposite Mr. Raichand. Without his permission. Rude, I know but I wasn't going to say it out loud.

"What brings you here?" Mr. Raichand's timid gaze shifted from one brother to another before looking at me for any hint. As if I knew what was running in their minds.

"Exactly my question," Viaan replied.

"Pardon me?" Mr. Raichand was anything but confused and his nervous gulp just confirmed it.

"You have nothing here. We monopolize all the business sectors in this part of the country. So, there is no opportunity for any other Indian Entrepreneur here," Viaan paused to bend forward with his elbows on his thighs as he completed, "Shouldn't it be *us* asking *you* that question?"

"[Woh...](#) Woh—" Mr. Raichand struggled to speak, making Viaan cut him off asking, "[yeh woh woh kya laga rakha hai](#), Mr. Raichand? Has the cat got your tongue?"

"I know what all the dirty deeds you have done. The first time I suspected you was when the fire alarm incident failed and that female staff spewed your name and coincidentally, the entire incident had a striking resemblance with a stunt pulled by none other than your beloved daughter, Nishika," Viaan had gotten up to walk towards the room covered by the curtains and pulled out a flushed Nishika standing in her pajamas.

She looked around to stop her heated gaze filled with hatred at me.

"Well played, Ms. Raichand. I must say. I wouldn't even have suspected you if you hadn't pulled a similar stunt in the university to ruin the homecoming weekend just because you weren't my date. And I was stupid enough to take in the words of the second guy you had set up to divert our attention towards Rathore, thinking he was responsible for everything. Trusting too much into you, hoping all the time that it wasn't you."

Viaan paced back and forth in the room as he continued, "but no. You got us to punish an innocent man for your crimes and causing another man to end up in a comatose state. That poor man died during the trial while the waiter is still fighting for his life! Just because you both were selfish! Can you live with that? Can you sleep at night peacefully? Well, apparently you can when you have enough guts to incite an old man to kidnap a married woman!"

Viaan shouted furiously at her face, shocking everyone.

Nishika burst into tears as she reached out to hold him, "Viaan, it's not what you think it is. I didn't—" Viaan cut her off as he shrugged her away, "you don't get to say that. How else do you suppose a little more than average businessman gets enough means to travel to South Africa, know when the interview will be, plan everything out, hire guards, rent a farmhouse, bribe internal staff and get a getaway car? Did you take me for a fool? Especially when you tried getting Rynah killed by that truck in Darjeeling?"

Nishika sucked in a breath in shock, well my condition wasn't any better.

It was her who had tried to get me killed? I felt my hands rolling up into fists, tempting me to punch her till she reflected her actions but then I wanted to hear more of her tales that were unveiling before us.

"And you simply supported your daughter in everything," Viaan looked at Mr. Raichand who cleverly shut his mouth and looked at the decorated tiles on the floor. But that wasn't the case with Nishika.

"How..." She wasn't even able to completely form a coherent question.

"The driver opened his mouth. Did you think he ran away as he was supposed to? Sorry to say, but we had him and we worked on him."

"Viaan, please... Listen to me... I love you, I'm crazy about you. You were supposed to be mine! I didn't mean to do any of it. But I can't live without you and looking at that nobody as your wife—" Viaan again yelled interrupting her, "this is my wife you are talking about, not a nobody. Watch your damned tongue before whom you are talking, Ms. Raichand."

Nishika whimpered while I felt my heart swell with happiness. The sounds of footsteps demanded our attention to find the cops coming to a stop at the entrance of the living room.

"You both will pay for your sins," Viaan promised as Neel called out, "officers! Take them away."

And just like that, a group of male and female officers walked in handcuffing the father and daughter. Nishika kept crying and begging for Viaan to forgive her but he didn't even look at her. A small part of me felt bad for the lady but then again doing wrong to others wouldn't lead anyone to their happiness.

"Viaan, please... I'm sorry! I did it because I loved you!" Nishika wept while being dragged away by the cops.

"Officers, just a minute," Viaan stopped the cops before walking towards Nishika to stand before her.

"I love you so much that it hurts," Nishika cried.

"And I've told you a million times that you were like my sister. I had never felt anything for you, or ever will. You cannot force someone to love you, Nishika. You should have understood that and mind your own business. You should have moved on rather than trying to ruin others lives," Viaan said calmly.

"Viaan, please... " Nishika begged.

"Now you reap what you have sown." Viaan signaled the cops to take her away and this time Nishika only sobbed at her doings and didn't beg. She must have finally understood the intensity of the situation and how badly they were trapped.

Feeling the exhaustion take over for the day, I moved towards Viaan and slipped my hand into his. He looked down at where our hands connected, thoughtfully, "Now, it's finally over."

"I'll see through the procedure and meet you at home," Neel informed before

walking out.

Viaan just nodded his head in acknowledgment while he stared at the way our fingers fit in together. I must say, they were like lost pieces of some puzzle finally put together.

"Now what?" I asked, looking at the farmhouse.

"Now we go home," Viaan tugged at my hand as he walked towards the door, dragging me along with him.

I slightly squeezed his hand making him look at me again, "How did you learn about where I was being kept? How did you find me so quickly?"

Viaan sighed before explaining, "I received a pen drive with video footage in which we could see the number plate of the vehicle. Vikrant hacked into the stoplight cameras and into the vehicle system to get the location."

"Did you ever wonder who sent you the pen drive?"

"I have. But, I also think I have an idea about it."

I was very much excited, to say the least, "who?"

Viaan turned to smirk at me, "In the due time love, in the due time which isn't now. There are a lot of things that you have no clue about, yet."

"Not fair, Viaan! There are just so many secrets surrounding you guys," I pouted hoping he would cave in.

"Which are best kept secrets," Was his only counter.

"Gosh, not this again!"

I must say, I was very much fed up with all the secrets that my family

harbored.

"Why don't you simply let this be for some other time and focus on the wedding that's coming soon? Anjali must be missing you."

"What the hell? Anjali's marriage got fixed? And you get to know that before me?" I felt my blood boiling! Oh, that Anjali!

Viaan laughed, "relax babe, your phone was unreachable and we were busy with the preparation for the interview this morning when Uncle Aadarsh had called to inform you about it."

"And you will be with me?"

He looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"For the marriage," I added with a blush.

"I guess I should. Can't risk you getting kidnapped once again now, can I?" He huffed playfully before turning to deliver a smirk at me.

"You are such a jerk, you know that?" I rolled my eyes but couldn't hide my smile.

Grabbing me by my waist and pulling me flush against his chest, Viaan whispered in my ear, "I remember you announcing it loud and clear before the board members during the assessment. Don't you?"

I felt my cheeks darken in embarrassment as the people kept staring at us. I tried to get out of his steel grip, "Viaan... let go. People are staring at us."

"Let them stare. It's not always that they get to enjoy a free show. You are mine, anyway. And this will just re-emphasize it."

I shook my head with an amused smile, "and I knew you were a barbarian in

a suit but today you just proved to be a caveman too. Beating his chest saying 'me man, me provide, you mine'."

He raised his eyebrow, "now you are being too humble by adding more to the list."

"It's like what Luv had said."

"Said what?"

"That I would get a real jerk, barbarian and a caveman in my life."

"Well, how did it all come to be like this? Who started it all?" Viaan mocked staring into my eyes as if telling me that I was to be blamed but I had other plans.

I gently pushed him away and he let go of me before grabbing hold of my hand again. I mocked a sigh as I replied, "If you ask me, I would only say that it started with an impulse."

"Impulse now, seriously?" He raised his eyebrows and shook his head with an amused smile.

"Yes, an impulse of a dog to chase me, my impulse to save myself, Aaryan's impulse to hunt me down after that and your impulse to accuse me."

I couldn't believe that I had listed down all the impulses.

"Shouldn't it be impulses then?"

"No, not impulses," I shook my head before looking at him and explaining, "since everyone had only one impulse each but yours is the one to be counted because that was what changed everything for me. My entire existence got a whole new meaning because of it."

He pursed his lips before letting them free. A genuine smile slowly formed on them, "and you gave a meaning to mine."

We reached the Cape Town mansion to find Abhimanyu sitting along with a woman in the living room waiting for us.

"Thank goodness you are okay, he got me so worried," the lady said, getting up from the couch as soon as she saw me like we had been best friends for a long time.

She was beautiful, I must admit. With jade skin, reddish sheen to her brunette hair, perfectly arched eyebrows, delicate and sharp features and plump red lips, she was like a model from the television advertisements.

"This is Abhimanyu's wife, Phalak. You may not know her yet but she knows a lot about you," Viaan introduced me to the fairy lookalike woman.

"Sorry about my manners," Phalak came forward to shake hands, "Aaryan has told so much about you that it feels as if I have known you for a long time."

"Aaryan?" I asked skeptically.

"Yeah, Aaryan never fails to update on the pranks he played on you and how you fell for it."

"That idiotic brother of mine will never change." Viaan sighed, sitting on the couch.

"Now what do we do?" Abhimanyu leaned on the hand rest of the couch.

"My men informed me on our way here that Raghav has left the country. But in my opinion, I would advise you both along with Nihaal to go abroad for a

vacation," Viaan looked at Phalak adding, "You know what we do at times like these."

"Yes, I know," Phalak nodded.

"Well, that should serve for the time being. So, why don't you join us for dinner?" I smiled.

"We wouldn't want to impose," Abhi politely refused.

"We insist," I added looking at Viaan who nodded his head, "please do."

"Nice, we can have some tension free time to ourselves then," Phalak added as everyone got up to head towards the dining room.

That day, we had been through a lot but then by the end of the day, we had each other because we stood with each other, for each other, during the crisis. Giving rise to a bond that couldn't be broken so easily. A true mark to trust, friendship, care and most importantly love.

An unsaid promise to be there every time we needed each other.

48. ADATAALEES

The traditional Indian trumpets blared in the background with the indication of the marriage ceremony taking place. The guests poured in like a fifty percent off sale had been announced. Well, why wouldn't they when Aviraj Agnihotri, the new managing director of a national online marriage agency, was himself getting married? Not to forget about the presence of the Raivardhans with four most eligible and *available* bachelor sons of my mother-in-law. Not that the Agnihotris and Batras were any less. Well, just a Batra, since Luv was of the market. So, only Kush was available.

Ambitious parents with matchmaking aunties, uncles and professional matchmakers from the marriage agency (*Aviraj's employees*) were present with only one motive: get their daughters married into the Raivardhans, if not, then into Agnihotris or at the very least, the Batras.

None of my brothers-in-law fell into that trap though a cousin of Aviraj's and Kush couldn't escape their fates.

May their souls rest in peace.

That wasn't my dialogue but Aaryan's. Don't get me wrong. I had nothing against those poor girls.

I found Ravi and his mother lurking around the corners of the banquet hall. They refused to meet my eyes but that didn't mean I hadn't caught Ravi staring at me with those regretful eyes. And my mom being my mom, gleefully informed me that they were still searching for a bride and hence shadowed one of the experienced brokers around the place.

Poor fellow...

That was the only feeling I harbored for Ravi. Pity. It wasn't my place to comment. They weren't my business anymore.

It had been a month since we returned from Cape Town and became busy with the sudden marriage preparations.

Apparently, Aviraj feared that Anjali would change her mind about everything and cancel the wedding, so he urged everyone to finalize the earliest date available for the wedding which would have been a week from the proposal, freaking everyone out.

After everyone guaranteeing him that Anjali wouldn't change her mind, including Anjali herself, he finally agreed for the date in the next month.

It wasn't his fault, poor guy, because it had taken a lot of his efforts to convince Anjali, especially after confessing his entire truth. She hadn't talked to him for days. Almost broke up with him for lying to her on her face but he didn't give up. He worked hard to win her back and now here they both were, sitting beside each other, blushing like it was their first time seeing to each other.

"I bet you don't remember anything from our wedding," The familiar deep velvety voice whispered above my ear from behind. His breath tickled my skin, raising the hair on my neck.

"Nah, I was grieving with the thought that I was marrying a grandpa," I replied after clicking my tongue and looking over my shoulder at my handsome husband. Viaan looked down with a mischievous smile.

"You made that very clear on our first night."

I couldn't help but laugh at the memory of that night. Especially the expression he had worn due to my outburst.

"Should I be apologizing for it now?" I let a smirk take over my lips and witnessed the darkening of his eyes.

"I wouldn't mind it, if you deliver it in the form I personally prefer," stepping in closer, he whispered huskily.

My breath turned ragged as my eyes fluctuated from his eyes to his lips, "and that would be?"

He leaned even closer, letting his breath tease my skin, "why don't we head back home to discuss more of it?"

I couldn't help but gulp at his antics. The mischievous spark in his eyes caused butterflies not just to flutter but soar in my stomach. His hand slipped through mine making it difficult to speak, "Um..."

"Shall we?"

Would Anjali be angry if I ditched her wedding now and head back home with my husband?

I looked at the bride who was occupied with the rituals and turned to face my

awaiting husband.

Damn... Can't resist him if he looked at me like that.

Especially, when he looked like an angel ready to take a flight.

Anjali, please forgive me.

I turned to tell him that we better get out of here before Anjali or someone else called for us. But before I could even utter a word, Viaan's phone went off.

Blinking out of the haze, Viaan picked his phone up and answered the call, "hello?"

"Yeah, she's here with me. I'll give it to her." He passed the phone over to me causing my eyebrows to quirk in question.

"Your mom wants to talk to you," He explained.

Taking the phone from him, I answered, "Yes Ma?"

"Where are you? I have been searching for you for some time now!" Was the first thing that she nagged.

"I'm by the [mandap](#). Why? Is anything the matter?" I looked up to find Luv calling out for Viaan. Viaan gently squeezed my arm before heading over to where Luv and other people stood in a small circle.

"Nothing, it's nothing. Just be around where you are, I'll find you in a few," My mom ended the call making me think 'few' what? Minutes? Hours? What? She always tends to do that. She would say 'in a few' and make a person wait for hours when minutes were expected. And she would appear out of thin air when hours were considered.

I hadn't finished contemplating my mom's unfinished statement when Viaan's phone went off again.

Carlos calling...

Now who was this?

I looked at Viaan to find him busy discussing something with Luv and others. Should I be disturbing them? But what if the call was important?

How about I pick it up, get the information and pass it on to Viaan later?

Reluctantly, I answered the call to hear, "Good afternoon, sir. This is Carlos Penham from Oxford. Your ward, Ritika Kundra's performance analysis is out and she has performed well. I have forwarded you the analysis report for your reference as you had requested. Worth being her sponsor, I'll admit."

I couldn't help but watch Viaan who was smiling at something that Luv said and turned to look at me. Saying something, he started to make his way back to me.

"I'll keep in touch with you about further her accomplishments. Have a good day," Carlos ended the call just like that. But my emotions had started to overpower me.

Upon reaching me, Viaan brushed his fingers against my cheeks and asked, "what happened? Why are you crying?"

It was only then I realized that I was indeed crying. Crying out of joy. Crying out of respect. He had not only sponsored Ritika for further education but had given her a chance to study in a world-class university and also remained anonymous to not let my parents feel like they were burdening him. Because I knew that my dad would have never accepted to send Ritika to such a prestigious university had he known that Viaan was financing it.

"Nothing. I just miss Anjali already," I sniffled to not ruin his efforts to keep the secret, which I had accidentally stumbled upon, a secret and smiled at him. In fact, I giggled a bit as I handed over the phone back to him.

"You are crazy, just like your nickname. Crazy," Viaan shook his head with an amused grin.

"So, how about that offer to apologize to you as you fancy it?" I bit my lower lip as my hand slid into his again to entwine our fingers together.

"And you already want to ditch the cousin you were missing terribly a few seconds ago?" Viaan raised his eyebrow teasingly but held onto my hand pretty firmly.

"What can I say? I can't see her [bidai](#), so save me right now."

I pouted innocently but all I wanted to do was kiss him endlessly and tell him how much I love him. Maybe even show.

He stared into my eyes, regarding me and my words carefully. Letting his eyes darken considerably at whatever he saw in mine.

"Then I better get you out of here really quick," He replied breathlessly, dragging me away towards the door. I don't know where or how we were going. All I knew was that I wanted to go wherever he went. Let it be home or hell. It didn't matter because he had become my home.

EPILOGUE

...A few days later...

“You know what he did then? Raj then turned around and said *'why don't we go have a honeymoon in Antarctica?'* And I just kept staring at him as if he has lost it. The shocking part was that he wasn't even joking in the first place!" Anjali threw her hands in the air as she narrated the morning incident she had encountered with her husband.

She arrived just before noon to take my suggestion about what to do with her nervousness regarding that *stage of life* she was going to be experiencing real soon. Not that I had any useful tips to share with her because the frustration and dejection along with jealousy had worked wonders for me that night. What was I supposed to tell her? Get frustrated? Or dejected and jealous?

Not a smart piece of advice...

I just laughed at her tale and asked, "so finally where did you guys decide?"

"Paris. City of love," She sighed with giddy evident in her face and I sighed dreamily.

I was happy for her but that couldn't replace the fact that I too longed for that type of experience. The thrill of sightseeing with my husband, having him by my side for twenty-four seven. In a sea of strangers, letting ourselves get lost only to find each other. Just him and I.

"Lucky you," I nudged her playfully.

"I know, right?" Anjali beamed so brightly that I ended up laughing.

"Rynah," Hearing the familiar voice of my husband, I turned around to find him approaching us. He was busy putting his cufflinks on and hadn't seen Anjali sitting beside me.

When he finally looked up, he greeted, "good afternoon, Anjali."

"Good afternoon, [Jiju](#)," Was her reply.

"Excuse me this time. There's an urgent matter calling for my attention," Viaan nodded and looked at me adding, "I'll be home late tonight."

I nodded my head in understanding before asking, "Prerna and Mayank wanted to hang out with me, just like the old times. May I go?"

He looked at me as he replied, "only if the guards appointed to you, go with you."

I felt my jaw drop down, "but Viaan-"

He didn't let me complete my sentence as he walked towards the elevator, adding, "don't even try to get out of the mansion without them. Drivers won't drive you and the watchmen won't let you out of the gate. I'll see you in the evening."

I couldn't help but grind my teeth as I glared at his retrieving figure. So bossy, even after all the things that have transpired between us. That arrogant, bossy jerk!

The sound of Anjali's laughter got me out of the one-sided staring competition.

"What are you laughing at? It wasn't funny!" I sulked as I crossed my arms across my chest.

"Believe it or not, that was very funny. You two haven't changed even when everything about you has," She wiped a tear from the corner of her eye as she added, "it's like only the hate changed into love between you two. The rest of it is still pretty much the same."

I just huffed at her words. Because it wasn't true and I didn't have enough energy to argue with her at the moment. Right now, I felt like going after Viaan and letting him have a piece of my mind.

Too childish of me, I know but he deserved it.

Mayank's eyes kept stealing glances behind me but Perna's eyes were stuck there wide open. With her mouth ajar. It had been fifteen minutes after I arrived and this was the scene that I had been trying to put up with.

I huffed and puffed as I eyed the baboons appointed by my *darling* husband. No pun intended, or perhaps it was. All of them were standing like some mannequins of macho men for display. With their fancy suits, Bluetooth devices stuck to their ears and those impenetrable jet black shades. I wonder if they could see anything or rather just pretended to know everything while being blind. Like Daredevil.

"Did you both call me here to keep ogling at my bodyguards?" I asked, finally feeling annoyed.

"They remind me of one of Salman Khan's movies, but only with four of them here," Perna sounded like a kid standing in an amusement park.

"Tell me, where do you find all these people?" Mayank wondered out loud.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes, "How about me asking Viaan to send these guys as dowry for your wedding? As a gift from us."

And I swear I could feel multiple pairs of eyes on me at the same moment. It wasn't difficult to understand that my words had frightened the hefty guards standing behind me while Perna's eyes twinkled with mischief.

She turned toward Mayank and trailed her manicured finger down his arm, "that's a fabulous idea, isn't it darling?"

And I swear I just witnessed one of the guards gulp from the corner of my eyes.

Mayank delivered a baffled look towards Perna.

"You will just have to pay their salaries while my five-year-old niece plays tea party with them," Perna added, making me purse my lips to not burst out laughing.

"And why in the hell would I do that?" Mayank exclaimed comically with his eyes wide with horror.

"Baby! Because you want to protect me when you aren't around, that's why!" Perna whined like a little girl making it, even more, harder for me to control my laughter.

"Why, baby? Who would be so insane to even think about messing with you?"

You won't be needing the bodyguards, perhaps even they may end up needing you," Mayank smart-mouthed, shaking his head.

Perna gasped in the offense as she questioned, "What do you even mean by that Mayank Dutt?"

Her hands were on her hips as she glared down at her poor boyfriend.

"I just meant you are more powerful than all of them combined together," Mayank smiled with uneasiness only causing Perna to narrow her eyes at him.

"Do you mean to say I'm Arnold Schwarzenegger?"

"Yes- I mean no! Definitely not! You are Perna *the Wonder Woman*. They should have taken you for that role," Mayank sweated profusely. And I couldn't control it any longer and burst out laughing. Behind me, I could hear the guards cough a little, trying to hide their sniggers at the exchange.

Oh! How I missed these two!

The rest of the lunch went on with these two bickering at every little thing. Just like the days of our uni. We stayed there for another hour and a half before conveying our goodbyes and going home.

Sighing out loud, I entered the elevator back home.

I had never expected my life to take such a drastic turn but in the end, I was grateful to my lord for changing my pitiful fate.

The elevator opened to show the backs of Vikrant and Viaan by the entrance of the living room. They were busy discussing about something seriously and I couldn't hear anything due to the distance between us.

As I neared them, their words became clearer and louder, "since you have

fired that imbecile secretary of yours, take Natasha for that position till a new secretary is appointed. After all, you have agreed to take on my role for those few more months."

Viaan sounded grateful and affectionate towards his brother but why was he burdening Vikrant with his part of the work too?

"Why? What's wrong? Why are you burdening Vikrant with extra work?" By the time I realized that it was my mouth that had spoken even before my brain ordered it, I couldn't help but press my lips together and close my eyes tightly, reprimanding myself.

Stupid! Stupid Rynah! And my stupid, uncontrollable mouth!

I had disturbed their flow of conversation and I knew I wouldn't be minding if Viaan scolded me like a five-year-old. When I opened my eyes again, I found both the brothers looking at me with amusement.

"What? Why are you looking at me like that?" I frowned as I looked at one brother at a time.

"Looks like you did my part of the job by yourself," Viaan put his hands into his pockets.

"And that would be?" I was baffled.

"Scold you," He smirked in reply, making me flush in embarrassment. I could feel my cheeks get hot enough to fry an egg on it.

"I thought I would be used to this by now, but I guess I'm wrong," Vikrant smirked.

"About?" That stupid mouth of mine again! Urghh! Could I ever control it?

"You and your unfiltered mouth," Vikrant's smirk widened.

"Hey!" I exclaimed in protest but Vikrant just turned around and waved his hand over his shoulder as he added, "wish you luck, bro. Only God knows how you do it."

"Do what?" I asked in frustration.

"Live with you," I swear I could hear Vikrant's smirk in his voice and wanted to pick up the glass vase on my right and throw it at him but Viaan's laughter made me direct my anger towards him while his annoying little brother slipped away, unharmed.

"What's so funny about this?" My eyes narrowed at my husband.

He shook his head answering, "he was just trying to get on your nerves."

"Well tell him 'mission accomplished'!"

Viaan chuckled some more at my expense while I crossed my arms across my chest and I tapped my foot, patiently.

"Now now, don't be such a grumpy little loris and get packing." I dropped my arms and stopped tapping at his words and looked at him questioningly. He just smiled in reply.

"Any special occasion?" I asked finally when he didn't show any signs of answering my unasked question.

"Yeah," He nodded nonchalantly before turning to look at me, "our honeymoon."

And the smile that he had graced me with just stopped my heart and stuck my breath in my throat.

Shaking my head out of the sudden surprise, I couldn't help but beam widely as I asked, "really? Where are we going?"

But he smiled as he ignored the question and walked ahead, that got me excited as hell as I ran after him, "Viaan! Where are we going?"

He didn't answer, only chuckled in reply and I didn't mind because I knew him well, he was teasing and playing with me.

Oh! That handsome devil of mine!

And just like that, another beautiful moment in my life had begun.

...To be continued...

BONUS CHAPTER 1

VIAAN

I woke up when a particular little troublemaker swirled in my arms, trying to lift my hand from her waist to slip away but I had other plans.

Tightening my arm around her, I pulled her closer. It just had been the previous night when we had dropped all the barriers from around our hearts and closed the distance between us, getting ourselves into our private little happy bubble. And I didn't want to get out of it just yet.

I kept my eyes closed, savoring this moment, breathing in her smell and memorizing the feel of her skin against mine.

I felt her turn around in my arms and stare at me for some time.

What I hadn't expected was her to start talking like she knew that I was awake, "I don't know what to feel or think anymore. You don't know but I... But I..."

Her trailing off made me curious. Was she confessing something thinking that I was asleep?

"You what?" She let out a short shriek when I asked after waiting for a whole

minute. My voice came out all hoarse giving me the itch to clear my throat but then I didn't because I was too busy hearing her freak out, "y-you are awake!?! I thought you were sleeping! You freaking pretended to be sleeping!"

I could tell that her eyes were wider than usual when she already had big doe eyes. I opened my eyes and looked into hers. And I was right yet again.

I don't know what it was about her that made me feel complete. Was it her goofiness or her trusting everyone so easily? It was surreal of someone to be so naive but after living with her for months there was no doubt, people like her did exist. She was genuine, not some actress with hidden intentions, like the other girls from the previous night.

I didn't realize that my grip over her waist had slackened a little. And that was all she needed to take off from the bed trying to escape me and my question. Like I was going to let her.

My hand flew up reflexively grabbing her wrist and pulling her back to me. She came crashing over my chest like falling rocks with those blazing cheeks of hers. My other arm circled above her waist, holding her in her place as I regarded her coolly asking, "why do you always run away when you feel that the situation is going to be difficult to handle?"

"I don't run away!" She exclaimed. Her denial evident in her body language.

She was an easy book to read. She had to try better than that to convince me.

"Oh yes you do. Mostly with me. Now continue with what you were saying."

As if her eyes weren't already wide open and her mouth ajar, they expanded a bit more to express her disbelief.

"Nothing! I was saying nothing at all!" She stubbornly replied.

I couldn't help but narrow my eyes at her, "I won't be letting you go today until you spill whatever you were saying."

Her lower lip stuck out a bit as she pouted and whined, "that's not fair..."

Just like a sulking little child. Troublemaker.

My eyes flickered to her lips arousing another stream of steamy desires from the night before to take over my senses. I looked back in her eyes to gauge her reaction as I smirked, "I don't really care. By the way, the cleaning staff will be here soon and I think they should also enjoy this little private show of ours."

Her face twitched like she was contemplating something. Nostrils flared while her iris bobbed up and down. She was infuriated for sure. Finally, not finding any other options, she closed her eyes and sighed in frustration as the pained expression came back to her face making me wonder what was it that was hurting her.

"I don't know what to say. I know that you don't love me when I have fallen deeply for you. You behave like you feel things for me when you love somebody else." She huffed before opening her eyes. I was shocked to hear her words. Not only her confession but also the accusation of me loving someone else. What the hell? What was she talking about?

"What?" I snorted incredulously at her words.

"I know about Nishika. And how much you love her..." She trailed off like she had proof about it. Me and Nishika together? Like seriously? Was this a joke?

I saw her long face with a defeated expression fueling my irritation. Her expression changed into bewilderment when I exclaimed in frustration, "What bullshit! Who told you that?"

Her wide eyes just blinked at me as more thinking went on in that head of hers.

"But I heard you confess that to her back home, by myself. With my very own ears."

That was it! I pulled her up to sit on my lap with a grave expression on my face. She immediately pulled up the bed sheets to cover herself. Gosh! This stupidly crazy woman! After our night together, she was still shying away and telling me something this crazy?

"Do you remember the date or day and where you heard something that absurd?" I asked, picking my laptop up from the nightstand and opened it.

"I can never forget that day. It was the day of our reception. You were with her in the library back home in Hyderabad. She was very upset about us getting married," She replied. Her voice filled with sorrow as if I had announced that her puppy died.

Crazy, I tell you.

I let go of her so that she could sit beside me while I opened a remote application connecting to the Raivardhan private network. Our very own third eye with endless memory.

Entering all the credentials, I clicked on a 'Monitor' button and selected recordings. A huge list of recordings appeared on the screen which I filtered using the search and got all the footage of that day. I selected the library footage and fast-forwarded it till Nishika entered.

"How can you do this to me, Viaan? How could you marry her when I've been waiting for you my entire life? You knew about my feelings for you, then why didn't you consider it?" Nishika shouted as soon as she entered and I got the entire memory replaying in my head.

I in the footage closed the file he was holding and sighed. Nishika had just asked for another argument even after telling her the same thing so many times.

"See Nishika, we are good friends, always have been. Whatever feelings you have had always have been from your side, not mine. And this isn't the first time that I'm telling you this. But here, I'm saying it all over again! It's not like I love you but now I'm married to her, she is my wife now." Yet I had repeated the same words in the footage making Nishika more bitter like how she usually turned out at the end of every argument that we had. On the other hand, Rynah's mouth fell open in shock.

I could even figure out how the information was being processed in her brain. She didn't look at me as guilt flashed in her eyes. She was undeniably reprimanding herself for being so silly. Slowly a tear slipped out of the pool collected on the edge of her wide eyes making them shine brilliantly reminding me of brown jaspers.

And that was all she needed to soften my heart. She was so sensitive and silly.

Silly little troublemaker.

"Hey, hey! Look at me. It's not your fault," I couldn't stop myself from cupping her face and turning it to look at mine, "it was the circumstances that had made us be the way we were. Don't cry now."

She threw her arms around me and cried out louder on my chest. Oh, my fucking goodness! What had she done to me? What had she done to my heart?

Before I knew it, my arms circled her slim body, pressing her closer to myself. Slowly rubbing the smooth jade skin of her back, I whispered sweet nothings.

An involuntary smile curled on my lips. She was full of idiosyncrasy! Stupid girl, why would I marry her if I had been in love with someone else?

I pulled away when she had calmed down and swept the hair away from her face to look at the tear stains and red puffy eyes. Yet she looked so innocent and adorable, "now shall we go down for our breakfast? Everyone must be waiting downstairs."

A pink blush graced her cheeks making that irresistible urge to throw her on the bed and take her again. That steamy desire of mine took over me once again but I snubbed it when she nodded in reply.

Not right now, Viaan. We will continue this later because right now she needed breakfast in her system from all the energy she lost in our copulation.

I smiled and pecked her forehead before getting out of the bed. She was a blushing little mess in my bed giving me another boner. Now, I was in need of a cold shower to cool this down, very badly!

BONUS CHAPTER 2

I was confused, well beyond confused after what I had witnessed a little while ago...

Well, chewing gum stuck in the hair might be more reasonable than the cat-ish brother-in-law of mine...

And most of the conversation that I heard between him and his victim of a wife, was more mind boggling than finding out about Vikrant's marriage! I mean, imagine you are lost in the ecstasy of a honeymoon and your husband suddenly receives a call informing him that his most difficult brother had brought home a wife. As a hostage. And the way they talked, why would you need a blackmailer somewhere outside when you have a husband who does a really good job at it? And the way he carried her away to the awaiting helicopter... I bet we will be in the breaking news by the end of the night again.

I couldn't help but sigh.

I could see the history repeat itself, kind of like a *déjà vu*. I could sympathize with the lady. Poor girl was thrown into the shark's reef. A very fine shark reef. Well, I wasn't sure about the details yet but I knew one thing, it wasn't the same as what had happened between me and Viaan.

My sister-in-law seemed to be more practical than me, and craftier. She has

more hope of surviving that insufferable man than anyone else that I know of.

I just wished that she had more time to tell me more about what was in the infamous gray file that had got us where we were today.

A mental note to self, make sure to ask her again about the file contents when we are alone. I am so dying to know what caused me to become Mrs. Viaan Raivardhan!

Anyway, I shook all the thoughts away as I entered the world class infrastructure that harbored one of the best medical facilities in the city. And trailing behind me like black teletubbies were four of my guards...

Not one, not two but effing four clones in black and white suits! Out of which, two were supposed to be for my sister-in-law who was snatched like a stray kitten on the roadside by her sadistic husband!

I wonder what will be written in the newspapers the next day. And here I go again, worrying about something else right after shaking it off my head.

I approached the receptionist who was busy chit-chatting with someone and asked, "Excuse me, may I know where to find Daksh Raivardhan?"

The girl who had been standing beside me and chatting with the receptionist just whipped her head in my direction so quickly that I felt my neck ache at her movement. Ouch.

Her eyes were wide and her lips were set in a grim, regarding me like I was an opponent that she would have to face in the boxing ring. She was absolutely stunning to look at. A heart face with delicate features, a straight nose, big eyes under the full eyebrows, a plumb bottom lip and a mole on her right cheek. Her wavy hair was pulled up in a messy bun and she was in teal scrubs.

I was not particularly sure what I had done wrong to be on the receiving end of the hostile gaze that I was receiving.

Before the receptionist could reply, the girl beside me opened her mouth, her features cooled to a composure that seemed to be friendly, but that smile of hers felt like a growling chihuahua trying to smile, asking, “Dr. Raivardhan? Oh ho... he just went for a small break. You have an appointment with him now? I can help you find another doc if it’s urgent. One of our bests!”

“Ah... not exactly, but he did tell me that he had squeezed me into his schedule for the day,” I couldn’t help but frown. Would Daksh call for me and then head out all of a sudden? Did something happen? Was the incident caused by Vikrant already needing some damage control? But that would be needing Neel and not Daksh... What do I do now?

I watched the shock on her face like I just mentioned something really odd to her.

“Squeezed you in the schedule?” she squeaked, literally squeaked like a squirrel! The girl looked like she might burst or rather faint any second now. As she puffed up, inhaling all the air like a pufferfish.

“You okay?” I couldn’t help but ask out of worry and not sure what to do if she really does end up fainting before me. Well, we were in a hospital anyway, so what could go wrong? Right?

She exhaled loudly and smiled so wide that it scared me for a second because she looked like a smiling demon from the horror movie *Smile*.

Was she really a doctor here or was she a psychiatric ward patient on loose in the scrubs? She’s not going to kill herself next before me and I won’t end up being haunted by that demon next, right?

As if to save me from the nightmare tonight or perhaps even give me a mini

heart attack, my phone went off, making me jump in my place and look at the caller ID. It was Daksh.

I received it immediately, “Hello Daksh? I’m in the hospital, where are you?”

“Oh, you’ve reached? Brilliant! I’m in the elevator, will meet you in a minute.”

The call ended soon after that. The face of the girl before me had transformed into a panic-stricken one. A lot of questions popped up in my head but before I could voice them, I heard Daksh call from behind, “Rynah?”

I turned around and smiled at my brother-in-law as we had a little french greeting of air kissing the cheeks. I couldn’t help but look over my shoulder once at the girl whose face had now become a tiny one. Desperateness was visible on her face and she followed us as Daksh guided me towards the elevator.

“I have confirmed with Dr. Sengupta, he will be doing a preliminary analysis once. Any delayed reports should come by email, so we will not be delaying any necessary treatment while we stay in Italy,” Daksh informed.

“Italy? You’re taking her to Italy? What? Why? When?” The girl who had followed us into the elevator asked, dragging the attention of all the people in the elevator. I didn't know if I should be annoyed or amused by her behavior. She was a character that I had never seen before. Quite animated. And brazen to be honest.

“Shanaya, what are you doing here?” Daksh, as if noticing her for the first time asked in a scolding tone as he added, “wasn’t it your turn to check up the wards?”

“Done and dusted, Doc. I have submitted my observations and was heading for lunch. Isn’t your lunch time a little bit from now? Why are you taking her

to Italy? Where in Italy? Is she coming with us? If you end up needing a future radiologist at that place, should I come along with you both just in case? And who is she? Does she live in Italy? Is she our new patient?” She asked, while her big eyes batted those eyebrows a little trying to look as innocent as possible. I couldn’t help but purse my lips, trying to hide my smile. She had no filter. She was worse than me in this regard!

“Shanaya, you do understand that it’s my personal matter? Why are you asking me about a patient’s details?” Daksh emphasized with a pointed look.

Her face all of a sudden became so small, like an inflated balloon had lost some air. With her eyes wide open, her lower lip quivered like she would break into tears anytime now as she replied, “If she is your patient, I will have to work with her at some point of time since you are currently my reporting mentor. Also, if she’s going to be with us in Italy, I thought, I should get to know her better so that I can help her with her condition. Since, I know that she is not from your family, I thought, I would try to make her stay a little more pleasant.”

Pleasant, my foot. This girl was going to give me a heart attack with her visible mood swings. But I sure was enjoying the little exchange here. Daksh stared at her for a whole minute making her squirm like a tadpole in the pond before exhaling loudly, “Shanaya, firstly, meet my sister-in-law, Viaan’s wife, Rynah Raivardhan. And Rynah, this is my mischief-maker-mentee, Shanaya Rao.”

As soon as she heard my introduction, her face visibly paled and her jaw dropped, while her eyes opened wider than they already were, “s-s-sister-in-law?”

She looked at me then at Daksh and then back at me as she suddenly grabbed my hand and shook it with all the power that she had, “nice to meet you big sister-in-law! You are so beautiful, that I thought a model from Italy had flown to meet my mentor at the hospital!”

I looked over my shoulder at Daksh, not really knowing what to do in this situation, but I must say, I was quite amused with how dramatic she was. And the way she reacted.

Oh, right, hadn't she said that Daksh was on his break when I enquired about him? But then it was her again, who asked if his lunch started in a bit... Wanting to see her reaction when I mentioned it to Daksh, I watched her from the corner of my eyes while asking Daksh, "Oh, weren't you on your break? Is it over?"

Shanaya's eyes widened even further, as if that was possible. A little more and her eyes might even fall off the sockets.

Daksh frowned asking, "who said that? I was waiting for you."

I turned to find Shanaya shaking her head frantically with horrified eyes only to stand statue-still when Daksh's eyes landed on her. Her eyes turned pleading, begging me to not throw her under the bus, making me end up chuckling a little at her antics before saying, "no one. I must have misheard it."

Placing her hand on her chest, Shanaya let out a breath and immediately stepped out of the elevator, walking backwards as she said, "it was nice to meet you, sister-in-law! I better get going, have to go to the wards, I will see you later!"

The elevator door closed before she could finish her sentence, nevertheless, we heard it loud and clear.

"She's quite a character." I commented, still looking at the elevator door.

"You got that right. She sure is," Daksh shook his head exasperatingly. Never had I ever seen him so annoyed before.

We soon resumed with the checkup. Dr. Sengupt who suspected it to be a cortisol awakening response caused by PTSD.

“Do you remember anything that was rather traumatic to you in your childhood?” he asked, pushing the reading glasses over the bridge of his nose and he looked at the exam pad he was ticking during the evaluation.

I tried hard to remember anything to supply to him but came up blank.

Since, I couldn't supply him with any event that was traumatic to me around the time it had started, he sat back sighing, “I suspect that you have a memory gap because of the trauma. The PTSD has had evidence of the memory gaps in the traumatized children, the same could have been in your case.

Anyway, get these tests done to be on a safer side, let us see if there happen to be any abnormalities in your head. Also, I'll give a few more follow up dates to help understand the cause for it, that would also decide whether or not you should start taking medicines for your probable PTSD.”

I woke up in a place that was dark and hot. The air felt musty and humid. Everywhere hurt in my body. How did I get here? Where was I?

I cried and called for my mother. I screamed for my father, but I couldn't see anyone.

The only source of light was the opening at the top with the sky in sight that was soon turning dark. The space was confined and the ground was hard. I was bleeding at many places.

My screams became more frantic when I felt something crawl on my back. My tiny hands and legs didn't have enough energy to climb back up the dry well I had fallen into. I don't know how long I have been here. Screaming

and shouting for help. Even my throat was dry and hurt from screaming. The big blue ball was the only thing that was accompanying me.

“Rynah!” someone shouted as a head appeared above. My teacher, she had found me!

“Miss! Here! I’m here!” I cried in a coarse voice. More teachers piled around and one of them started climbing down.

They put a rope down that they fastened around me and pulled me up. I was feeling claustrophobic and nauseous and ended up fainting halfway up.

When I woke up again, I heard the principal scolding the teachers, “What kind of teachers are you? How can you not be able to take care of handful of kids? If the parents get to know about this, we might even get sued for your carelessness! Thankfully, the child was not hurt very badly. Else we were done for!”

The incident had left me with minor injuries. I was sent back home early from the trip due to my fever. But no one had figured out the mental trauma that a young child of ten had incurred.

I remember that I had gotten down the well halfway to retrieve the ball when I had fallen and hurt myself, fainting on a field trip. The incident had mentally scarred my brain enough to make me forget about the trauma but retain the consequences for a long time due to incorrect diagnostics.

I opened my eyes to find Dr. Sengupta sitting before me and Viaan was rubbing my upper arm supportively. That was when I remember that it was one of the follow up sessions that I was recommended to take up and Dr. Sengupta had conducted a hypnotherapy that helped me remember the forgotten trauma.

Can’t believe I was traumatized by falling into a dry well...

Compared to the events that I have faced in my last few months, dry well looked like a cakewalk. How did I not end up being more traumatized in the last few months? I looked over my shoulder at Viaan who was busy discussing the further course of action with Dr. Sengupta. My heart skyrocketed recalling the fact that he had set aside his time from his jam packed schedule for my hypnotherapy session and came with me for emotional support.

If I looked at it from another perspective, perhaps, it was because of him that I wasn't residing in one of the wards of a mental asylum? He was my traumatizer yet also my savior. Perhaps, I was already broken beyond my capacity, that it was hard to break me any further...

And here I go again with my idiotic logic.

Stupid stupid Rynah! Perhaps the trauma will get traumatized after living with you!

Shaking my head to get rid of the thoughts, I started listening to what Dr. Sengupta was explaining, “—the new places perhaps would have reminded her of the feeling of waking up in the well, the panic had worsened over the time when no familiar face came into view for the given period.

Thankfully, the PTSD seems to be of an uncomplicated form, which doesn't warrant any medication in her case unless absolutely necessary, just some more sessions of psychotherapy should do wonders.”

Both the men turned to smile at me, making me give back an embarrassed smile. Thank god! I did not need any meds, else my mother would freak out directly jumping to the conclusion that I was lunatic! Wouldn't we all do that when we hear anyone visiting a psychiatrist? Judging people as and when it pleased us without knowing anything regarding their difficulties or the details of their disorders. But not every illness was the same, nor every patient was a lunatic. We were all broken in our own ways. We all deserve support and

respect not caring what anybody would say.

Even now as we walked out of the door, Viaan's hand was in mine that comforted my soul. He leaned over and whispered in my ear, "there you go, I guess we found your lost screws and patched you up."

I looked at him with a mean glare making him chuckle.

Was he also calling me insane? The same way my mother would have thought?

As if reading my mind, he replied with a gentle smile, "if you were insane, I must be worse than insane but that shouldn't define us for what we are. If the world has a problem with it, the world can deal with it. Just know that I am always there for you, no matter what."

And just like that, he melted my heart once again. My amazing husband, just what in the hell did I do so right to end up with him?

Guess, I have an entire life ahead of me to figure that out.

BONUS CHAPTER 3

VIAAN

“**Viaan,**” I was woken up by rapid shaking. My blurred visions focused on the one face that made my heart soft. I could even recognize her in the dark of the night, with just her gentle touch. However, her face harbored tension that only I could perceive in the dim moonlight that entered from the open window.

“[Ma?](#)” I asked, my hoarse voice coming out in a worry that had been induced from her stress.

My mother, Aradhana placed a finger over her lips, signaling me to remain quiet as she looked over her shoulder to watch the patrolling guard walk by the window. The darkness of the room hid us both in its veil. We waited till the sound of the footsteps dimmed before my mother quickly helped me out of the bed and exit the room.

I looked at her soundless feet which usually used to invoke the sound of [payal](#) whenever she walked. Today, she wasn't wearing them.

We were careful enough to not get caught by the patrolling guards as we headed towards the stables. Many times we had to stop and hide behind the pillars and in the darker corners of the strongholds that we knew like the back of my hand.

It was way past midnight. The moonless night was darker than the other new moons. My heart thundered in my head as my hitched up breathing made my senses overwhelmed.

I knew it instinctively. The time my mother had been preparing me for so long had finally come.

We slid into the stable, quietly.

It was darker inside than it was outside. It took some time for my eyes to adjust. Nevertheless, I could see the silhouettes in the center of the stable. They were turning to face us as my mother hurried towards them.

The first thing that my eyes could make out was the familiar face that I had initially hated but then it was my mother who had taught me well. She had taught me not to hate someone just because I thought she had been unfair to me and her. She made me realize that they were just as much victims as we were. Asha's face became clear in the dark of the stable.

Two of her sons were sleeping on her laps while the eldest son Vikrant was staring at the night sky from the skylight.

“Are you ready? Did you get everything you need?” Mother asked her in a hushed voice as she handed her a pouch.

“Yes, I have everything here,” Asha replied tiredly, covering her swollen belly with her veil.

“This has some money, the tickets of the train and details of the boarding pass. The agent will need it,” my mother gushed hurriedly as she helped her up after picking up one of the sleeping children.

“But [Didi](#), why are you telling me this?” Asha asked, confused.

“It's better if both of us know about it, we don't know what kind of situation

can come up,” mother replied as she grabbed Daksh’s hand who was rubbing his eyes and headed towards the other side of the stable. It was a deadend for anyone who wasn’t familiar with the layout.

But for us, it was a door for our escape.

Putting Neel down, she pushed some hay away which revealed a trap door that could fit a person through it. She opened the hatch and lit the lantern to illuminate the steps in the ground.

“Viaan, go down, take this,” she instructed, making me take the lantern and head down. I waited for her next instruction as she helped Asha down the stairs. Vikrant who enjoyed following me around, had jumped his way behind me but Daksh held onto Asha’s dress as mother had picked up a crying Neel, trying to lull him back to sleep.

That was when we heard someone shout loudly outside. Soon we could hear the blaring of the horns, indicating an emergency.

The shouting intensified as mother rushed after Asha. The sound of the stable door being pulled apart echoed loudly as mother closed the hatch behind her and our little group rushed through the tunnel.

It was a short tunnel that would lead us right outside the stronghold walls. Towards the unpaved road that not many traveled through.

We got out of the tunnel and down the unpaved path when we heard right behind us.

“[Wahan koi hai! Koi bhag raha hai!](#)” followed by the sound of the gunshot.

Neel and Daksh started crying at the sudden loud bang. Asha had frozen in her steps. And the footsteps after us had turned louder, indicating whoever it was, was catching up with us.

“Viaan!” my mother called, making me halt and turn to look at her as she

passed a crying Neel to me. The child was beyond recovery.

“Do as I have taught you! Lead them out of here!” mother shouted, my heart was beating with a fear I had not had before. It felt like I wouldn’t see her again if I left her now. Upon not seeing any movements from my side, she shouted again, “go!”

As if her words woke me out of my trance, I rushed forward, pulling Asha’s hand while carrying Neel with my other, I pulled her out of her frozen state and rushed towards the place I was so familiar with. While my mother ran towards the man who was still firing in the dark and started brawling with him over his rifle.

“Vikrant!” Asha shouted over her shoulder making the child run after us.

We had almost reached the end of the path. The shimmering headlights of Uncle’s car caught my attention. Asha had dragged Daksh with her free hand while Vikrant was right on our heels.

Uncle quickly jumped out of the car and picked the children up before depositing them into the backseat. Breathing raggedly, I looked around to see if my mother had made it, when I found her running towards us. What she couldn’t see was someone standing behind her, in the dark.

No... Don't do it...

All of a sudden, another shot went off and my mother fell, right before my eyes.

No! Not again!

The headlights of the car illuminated the face I would never forget. Raghav, stood there holding the rifle with a lit cigar in his mouth.

No... No, no no no, please! This wasn't happening again! Not now!

“Maa!” My scream sounded strange to my own ears as my heart stopped and

I tried to run towards her but an arm out of nowhere grabbed me and put me in the vehicle.

My eyes watched as she struggled on the ground, telling something. Perhaps even shouting. But my ears had gone deaf, for all I could hear was silence while my eyes witnessed the scene that I could never forget.

I woke up sitting, drenched in my own sweat, gasping for air, like I had that night.

My eyes landed on Rynah who placed her hand on my shoulder and looked worried but all I could feel was numbness that had taken over my body.

My body worked on reflex, like it was automated. Pushing the blanket away, my hand grabbed the phone from the nightstand, dialing a number that was on a speed dial and placed it over my ear.

Memories of my mother, fresh in my mind as I walked up to the window and waited for the call to be answered.

The call was answered on the fourth ring and a low, husky, "hello," came through.

"Abhimanyu, Viaan here. I have news for you," I spoke, my voice was hoarse from my dry throat that begged for water. As if understanding the urgency of the hour, Abhi went completely silent, waiting for me to go on.

"*Raghav* got his bail," I added, making him audibly suck in a breath. Who would know better than Abhi and Nihal what Raghav was capable of.

"And we are coming," I further informed him, pausing to wet my lips and look over my shoulder at my worried wife before adding, "to Cape Town."

There was a score to settle that had been left as it is for a while now. And I don't intend to let him get away with it.

SMIRK OF A JERK

PREFACE

Don't *look down. Don't look down.*

Just continue what you are doing. Just don't look down.

For the second time in the day my mind was freaking out. Perhaps for the second time in my life.

The sound of the door bursting open caught my attention, making my spine stiffen.

Oh god! Let them be dumb and blind enough to not see my life support at the moment.

But then the words of that stupid gypsy about my inauspicious star came back haunting my mind. Not that I believed her nor was I going to believe her because everything was utterly nonsense! Only science and logic made sense, not some Raahukaal and shani something.

It was just my stupid mind holding back the words on encountering some coincidence with the said words.

"Oh shit!"

I looked up to find three shocked faces pushed out of the window.

Guess it was my inauspicious star. I rolled my eyes.

I held onto my makeshift rope tightly as I started to speed up my descent.

"Go down!" Vikrant commanded as he narrowed his eyes into slits at me.

Okay, if that's what he wanted. I smirked sliding down a little before halting as it burned my hands a bit.

"Not you!" He growled before looking at his surgeon brother who stood frozen beside him and called out, "Daksh!"

And immediately, he came back to his senses and disappeared out of sight. Definitely running down the corridors and stairs to make it down there on time.

In the ruckus caused by these idiots, I had failed to notice the light burning out of the window on the ground floor, oblivious to the fact that Neel, who had been studying some case he was handling in his bedroom, had noticed the bed sheet escape rope but hadn't realized what it really was. He had come out to inspect the item, baffled, when he looked up and spotted me dangling in the middle of nowhere.

"What the hell!?!!" He exclaimed in surprise right when Daksh had skidded to stop beside him.

Now, I could neither go up nor down. Good Lord!

"Have you lost it?" I looked back up to find Aaryan holding Vikrant back as he stared at him like his brother had really lost it. He continued, "that's a bed sheet not stainless steel to hold both of your weights!"

GLOSSARY / TRANSLATIONS

GLOSSARY

Di / Didi : short form of 'Didi', meaning elder sister

Wala : 'Wala' is a notorious word for its different meanings and spellings. Most visitors to India know it in the context as it refers to a seller or vendor of something. For example, a taxi-**wala** is a taxi driver. A vegetable-**wala** is a vegetable seller. But in this chapter it's referred to Viaan as '**Viaan wala interaction**' meaning '**Viaan like interaction**'.

Payal : anklet

Anand : Anand is a word used as a name meaning Happy in Hindi, as well as a name.

Yaar : in hindi means 'mate'. Just like how 'mate' can be used to address friends and even lovers, that's how 'yaar' is also used according to the context.

Shayari : small urdu poems.

Shayar : poet in urdu.

Ma : mother

Ghagra : traditional Indian outfit for women, usually

consists of a jacket/top and a long skirt.

Lengha : *the skirt of ghagra.*

Sehra : *the royal turban with a stop of beads or flowers or any other thing like that covering the groom's face.*

Sangeet : *a marriage ceremony conducted the previous day of the actual marriage where people sing, dance and assemble.*

Haldi : *another marriage ritual where the bride and the groom(together at the same place or separate at different locations) are applied with the turmeric paste.*

Mehandi : *another marriage ritual where Henna paste is applied to the bride in various designs (on her hands and legs).*

Maangtikka : *a jewelry worn by girls on their heads, usually over their hair part line.*

Sherwani : *the traditional Indian outfit for grooms. Usually consists of skin tight pants and a long coat like top.*

Mandap : *the stage containing the holy fire and where the priest, the bride and the groom sit to complete the ceremony. A pavilion where the wedding ceremonies take place in Hindu culture.*

Phere : *the circumambulations performed during marriages.*

Mangalsutr : *the jewelry made out of gold and black*

beads to signify that the woman wearing it is married.

Sindhur : the red colored powder that Indian ladies apply over their hair part line.

Shehnai : Indian musical instrument that is similar to an oboe.

Agneepath : the path of fire(path filled with difficulties)

Kaaliya : is a name of a character in the movie Sholay which is usually used to impart dramatic context to a general conversation.

Bidai : a ritual of a bride bidding farewell to her family and leaving of her maternal home. Literally translating to the phrase 'Goodbye,' Vidai/Bidai is one of the most sentimental outbursts of any wedding across the world.

Paisa : a monetary unit of India and Nepal (and formerly of Pakistan), equal to one [hundredth](#) of a rupee.

TRANSLATIONS

"*Kya samajh kar aaye the? Sardar bahot khush hoga? Shabashi dega? Kyoon?*" - what did you think before coming here? That master would be really happy? Will he praise you? Why?

Kashmakash ke halat main dala tumne humko - You have put me in a dilemma

Raat aur din main na rahe ab farak mujhko - Where night and day are no different to me

Rah par se bhatka aise ke dhoond rahi sari duniya - Lost from my path in such a way that the whole world is searching (for me)

Jab tumne poocha ki meri problem kya hai, toh suno - When you asked what is my problem? Then listen

Meri problem bhi tum ho aur solution bhi tum ho... - My problem is you and my solution too...

Picture abhi baki hai mere dost, picture abhi baki hai - the movie is yet to complete my friend, the movie is still remaining.

Iss khushi ke mahol mein, ek gaana toh banta hai. - On this happy occasion, let's celebrate it with a song.

Woh - that

Yeh woh woh kya laga rakha hai? - Why are you stuck on saying 'that' 'that'?

Jiju - brother-in-law

Wahan koi hai! Koi bhagraha hai! - There's someone over there! Someone's getting away!

Hum yahan Hyderabad main paley bade hain. Yeh jo ganda sa khel tum khel rahe ho, yeh sab pata hai - We have grown up in Hyderabad. We know what kind of dirty game you are playing here.