

Nandini

A Story of Love and Relations

By

Anne Reporter

Prologue

This is the story of Nandini, a character inspired by *Three Idiots* and *Brave Man*. Since the age of 20, she dreamed of a man who would sweep her off her feet—riding in on a horse like in the fairy tales. It all began with a life-changing experience. What was that experience, and how did her dream finally come true?

Read on to find out.

Chapter 1

I was born into a business family and grew up in Guntur, near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. As a child, I was shy but observant. My father, a contractor handling government projects—offices, bridges, and roads—managed a thriving business. I enjoyed the privileges of being a wealthy contractor’s daughter, but I was also deeply curious about the world around me.

My cousin Rahul always dreamed of becoming a doctor. While I admired his ambition, I knew my path would be different. I never saw myself as a doctor or a nurse. I wanted to be a leader—a manager who could guide and inspire people. Watching my father oversee his employees fascinated me. I aspired to wield that kind of authority and influence. My parents never discouraged my instinct to take charge, whether with friends or in everyday situations.

Until my first year of college, life moved along uneventfully. Then one day, something happened that changed everything.

One of my father’s clients left behind a copy of *Andhra Bhoomi*, a Telugu magazine, at our house. Curious, I flipped through its pages, skimming stories and serials, until a section for pen pals caught my eye. One name stood out: Kumar. He was from Bombay, studying for his degree, and enjoyed reading, playing cricket, and listening to music. Intrigued, I decided to write to him.

I took an inland letter from my father’s desk, copied down Kumar’s address, and introduced myself—sharing my hobbies and interests. To my surprise, I received a reply within a week. Kumar explained that it was his sister who had submitted his name to the magazine, but he’d decided to give pen-friendship a try. His handwriting was messy but readable, and his tone polite and engaging.

Over the next year, we exchanged letters regularly. One day, Kumar wrote to say he’d be visiting Hyderabad and Vijayawada, where his grandparents lived. Excited, I invited him to Guntur and asked him to send a photo so I could recognize him at the bus stand. While I was hesitant to send mine, he happily sent his.

On the day of his visit, I waited at the bus stand where buses from Vijayawada arrived. It took him half an hour to show up. Kumar was just as I had imagined—about five feet five inches tall, slightly dark-skinned, and radiating a warm, trustworthy vibe. When I introduced myself, his smile dazzled me.

I led him to a bus heading to the Krishna Riverfront. As the vehicle bounced along the uneven roads, I instinctively grabbed his hand for balance. It was the first time I’d sat so close to a man outside my family, and the moment sent a thrill through me.

We arrived and took a boat to a small island in the river. Finding a quiet spot behind some shrubs, we sat down. I hoped for something romantic to happen, but Kumar remained a perfect gentleman, chatting about his life and interests. His voice and presence made me feel as though I were floating in a dream.

Eventually, he put his arm around my shoulder and spoke softly near my ear. I didn’t even process his words—I was completely absorbed in the sensation of his touch. When another couple approached, he quickly moved his arm away. Embarrassed, I looked away. But something stirred within me. I leaned over and kissed him lightly on the lips, then pulled back, unsure of how he would react.

To my relief, Kumar reassured me. “Don’t be shy,” he said warmly. “This is my first kiss too. Thank you for sharing this moment with me.” He gently turned my face toward his and kissed me back—softly at first, then more deeply. It was a connection that was both thrilling and comforting, unlike anything I’d ever felt before.

Time slipped away until I realized it was getting late. My mother would start asking questions if I didn’t return soon. Reluctantly, I told Kumar we had to go. He helped me up, and we brushed the sand from our clothes before walking back to the boat.

After seeing him off at the bus stand, I returned home—but I couldn’t stop thinking about him. Would I see him again? Would he come back to visit me? I didn’t know. But I hoped with all my heart that he would.

Chapter 2

By the following year, we had moved to Hyderabad. My father had secured a significant government contract there, expected to last four to five years, so it made sense for our family to relocate. We initially rented a house in Chikadpalli, a modest middle-class neighborhood. For his work, Dad frequently traveled to Jubilee Hills, a rapidly developing area. Seeing its potential, he bought a plot of land and began building a house. Within nine months, construction was complete, and we moved into our new home.

Meanwhile, I continued exchanging letters with Kumar. In one letter, he mentioned that he had injured his leg playing cricket and would be resting for a while. Still, our correspondence remained regular and engaging.

Not long after, Kumar wrote to say he was coming to Hyderabad. He planned to stay with his father's friends near Kacheguda Station. Since he already had my address, I also gave him our home phone number so he could contact me when he arrived.

Soon after he reached Hyderabad, Kumar called. Coincidentally, my parents were headed to Guntur for a wedding and planned to stay there for a few days. Sensing an opportunity, I invited Kumar over. I told my mother I couldn't accompany them because I needed to prepare for exams.

Kumar arrived a day later. He found our home easily—thanks to the construction of a nearby school, which made directions straightforward. He rang the doorbell, and when I opened the door, joy surged through me. I welcomed him in, offered him a seat on the sofa, and asked if he'd like something to eat or drink.

"Anything is fine," he said casually. I brought him snacks and tea from the kitchen, which he quickly finished—he seemed quite hungry.

I joined him on the sofa, turned on the TV, and we talked for hours. I mentioned that my parents were away for a couple of days, subtly implying that we had time to ourselves. We had shared our first kiss by the river months ago, and now, I longed for more.

He picked up on my cue, stood, and gestured toward the bedroom. I led him there.

That day, I truly discovered what it meant to be in love. Kumar kissed me deeply, his lips trailing down from my mouth to my legs and back up again. He brushed his lips over my chin, down my neck, igniting a new kind of longing. Gently, he undressed me, leaving me in just my bra and panties. He kissed the tops of my breasts, then pushed up my bra and focused on my nipples with his lips, sending shivers through me.

His kisses continued down my stomach, pausing at my navel. With slow precision, he eased down my panties, revealing all of me. He moved between my legs, exploring me with his tongue—an overwhelming and intimate experience that felt both unfamiliar and exhilarating.

When he was finished, he lay beside me, and we drifted off to sleep in each other's arms. That evening, I took him to a nice restaurant for dinner. We returned home, watched TV for a while, then went back to the bedroom.

This time, he kissed my back and undressed me from behind. Standing behind me, he cupped my breasts and entered me in a doggy-style position. When we were both spent, we rested.

A couple of hours later, he woke me up. We went downstairs for coffee and a light snack before returning to the bedroom one last time. This time, he positioned himself with his mouth at my vagina while his penis was near my lips. We pleasured each other in that intimate arrangement for several minutes. Then, I took control, sitting on him and guiding him inside me. I moved rhythmically, and when we were finished, I rolled off, kissed him good night, and we fell asleep.

In the morning, I drove him near his residence and dropped him off. He didn't invite me in, and I didn't ask to go inside.

The next day, my parents returned. My mother studied my face and said, "What's happened to you? You look different."

"I've been studying a lot. Maybe I just look tired," I replied.

"You don't look tired," she said, narrowing her eyes. "In fact, you look like you had a very good night's sleep."

"Yes, after finishing my studying, I slept well," I said casually.

But how could I possibly confess that Kumar had visited and how beautiful our time together had been? I couldn't imagine what kind of punishment I'd face if she ever found out.

I felt a pang of fear when my period was delayed by two days. Until then, it had always been regular. When it finally came, I wondered if the papaya I had eaten had helped.

Life resumed—college by day, home by evening—but time moved painfully slowly. I waited anxiously for word from Kumar about another visit. His letters continued, but they became more distant, formal, devoid of any romantic warmth. Perhaps it was for the best. If my parents ever intercepted one of those letters, I shuddered to think of the consequences.

Two long years passed before I received another letter from him. He wrote to say he'd be visiting Hyderabad again and staying with his sister, who had recently married and moved to the city. He included her address so I could write to him there.

For two days, I waited for a call. None came. Maybe he was busy, I thought. Eventually, unable to contain my anticipation, I decided to visit him at his sister's house.

Taking the letter and the car, I drove across the city, stopping along the way to ask for directions. When I finally arrived, I was greeted not by Kumar, but by disappointment. He wasn't home.

His sister's mother-in-law welcomed me, offered me water and tea, and chatted with me for a while. When I mentioned that Kumar had been my pen pal for several years, she began sharing stories about his family.

Then came the shock: she mentioned that Kumar had come to Hyderabad to write his college exams. My mind reeled—hadn't he said he was studying in Bombay? That one detail shattered the image I had of him. Was everything he told me a lie? Had I given myself to a man who had never truly been honest with me?

I left the house numb, her words echoing in my head. Had he lied to other girls too? Had I fallen for a fraud?

As I drove through the streets toward Jubilee Hills, my mind was in turmoil. I was so lost in thought that I barely noticed the traffic light turn amber. Believing I could still cross the intersection, I accelerated—just as a speeding lorry approached from the side.

The last thing I remember is the impact.

Chapter 3

I woke to the hum of machines and the sterile scent of disinfectant. The world around me felt foreign—white walls, harsh fluorescent lights, and the soft beeping of a heart monitor. Tubes connected my arm to an IV stand, and a dull ache radiated through my body.

I spotted a button near the bed and pressed it hesitantly. Moments later, a nurse entered. Her expression lit up with a mix of surprise and relief.

“You’re awake,” she said softly. “I’ll call the doctor.”

She stepped out briefly, then returned. “Your parents will be here soon,” she added gently.

I wanted to ask more, but my throat felt raw. I gestured weakly for water. She brought a glass with a straw and helped me sip. The cool liquid soothed my parched throat.

“Where am I?” I whispered.

“You’re at New York Hospital.”

“How did I get here?”

“Your parents brought you here for treatment. You were in a coma for two weeks in India before being flown here. You’ve been unconscious for about a month.”

Her words hit me like a wave. “A month?” I echoed.

She nodded. “Your father stayed nearby. He had some work here, so he remained close.”

I frowned. “Why bring me all the way here? Why not get treatment in India?”

She hesitated, then said, “Your chart mentions an abortion following the accident.”

I froze. “An abortion?” My voice cracked. “That’s not possible... I didn’t...” My words trailed off, confusion overwhelming me.

“I’m just relaying what’s on your record,” she said gently.

Her words stirred a flood of fragmented memories—Kumar’s face, his visit to my home, and the blurry sequence of events. I remembered our intimacy, the tender moments we’d shared. But had I forgotten something? Could I have become pregnant and not realized it?

The more I tried to piece things together, the more fragmented it all became.

The door creaked open. My parents entered, their faces drawn with worry.

“How are you feeling?” Mom asked, brushing my hair back. Her voice trembled.

Dad stood beside her, quiet. Finally, he said, “It was the lorry driver’s fault.”

Neither of them mentioned the abortion. Maybe they thought it was better not to overwhelm me.

After a while, Dad left, citing work. Mom explained, “Reddy Uncle gave him some assignments—a power project near Rajahmundry. He’s been juggling that while staying close to you here.”

Her words offered little comfort. Questions gnawed at me. What really happened that night? Had I truly lost something without even remembering?

A month later, I was discharged. Perhaps to give me a fresh start, Dad enrolled me in a hospital management program in New York. I completed my post-graduation two years later.

During that time, I avoided romantic entanglements. My only friends were my two roommates, both in relationships. I kept my distance, but Kumar lingered in my thoughts. His memory, once hazy, began to crystallize.

I vividly recalled the day of the break-in—studying alone, the door creaking open, fear gripping me. A stranger entered, but before I could react, Kumar appeared behind him. The intruder dropped a bag and fled.

Kumar checked the bag. “Nothing valuable,” he said calmly, securing the doors and windows. His presence soothed me. We sat close, and soon, I kissed him. He kissed me back. That night, we made love. For two days, we were inseparable. On the third, I dropped him at his sister’s home.

And then... the accident. My memory went blank.

When I returned to Hyderabad, Dad was working on a hospital project in partnership with my uncle. It was intended for my cousin Rohan, a heart surgeon. To prepare me for a future administrative role, Dad arranged for me to train at a hospital in Mumbai.

There, I joined as a trainee hospital administrator. Six months into my training, a software company approached us to implement a hospital management system. Rajesh, one of their engineers, visited to understand our needs. I gave him a tour and explained our workflow. Later, I learned the contract had political backing, facilitated through the Maharashtra Sena.

Progress stalled. One day, I was summoned to the administrator’s office. A man was seated across from him.

“Nandini,” the administrator said, “this is Kumar, now heading the software project. You’ll coordinate with him.”

My heart skipped a beat. **Kumar.**

“Hi, I’m Kumar,” he said politely.

Struggling to stay composed, I replied, “Come with me,” and led him to my cabin.

Once seated, I cut straight to the point. “Your team has barely made progress.”

He nodded. “That’s why I’m taking over personally.” He handed me his card.

“You’re the Managing Director?” I asked, surprised.

“Yes. I reassigned Rajesh and the others. I want to get this done myself.”

“Why you?”

“We’re a small firm. Experienced developers are hard to find, and the industry’s still new.”

“How did you get into this?”

He smiled faintly. “By chance. A software firm asked me to fix a system their team had failed to debug. After I succeeded, I was offered more responsibilities. Eventually, I started building tools for political data analysis. One helped a party win an election. That success brought funding and partnerships. Now, I hold the largest share in my company.”

“Shall we begin the review?” he added.

We toured the hospital—billing counters, report sections, administration. He took detailed notes, collected documents, and observed workflows.

Before leaving, he said, “You’re welcome to visit our office anytime.”

After receiving approval from the administrator, I followed him to the parking lot. To my surprise, he was still there, smoking.

“I thought you left,” I said.

"I was just about to."

"I got clearance to visit your office. Can you take me?"

"Sure," he said, gesturing toward the car.

We drove to a quaint bungalow.

"This is our new office," he said.

"It's beautiful. Yours?"

He nodded. "And the adjacent one, too."

A servant greeted us at the next house. A woman holding a baby appeared.

"This is Loveleen," Kumar introduced. "She's one of our major investors. Nandini is helping with our hospital software."

I smiled and greeted her. "How old is your baby?"

"Not even a month," Kumar answered for her.

After brief conversation, he took me to the office. I met Pauleen, the receptionist, and was shown the development area. Kumar introduced me to Rajesh and others. He then took me to a separate cabin.

"This is yours now," he said.

"Really?" I asked, stunned.

He smiled. "You'll need a workspace."

We then entered another room. "Do you live here?" I asked.

"No," he replied.

"But it looks like someone could."

He shrugged. "That's the idea—just in case I need to stay overnight."

"Where do you live?"

"Vikhroli. With my wife and kids."

"You're married?" I asked, surprised. "And you have kids?"

He nodded, casually.

He made us tea and we talked. "How much have you spent on this office?" I asked.

"I don't know yet. Haven't received all the bills. The computers are paid for. The interiors were done by Loveleen's firm. I'll add her costs to her capital share."

"This whole building is yours?"

"Yes. Bought from my own earnings."

"In just a year?"

He smiled. "Our business took off quickly. Credit goes to Loveleen. What started as a favour became a company."

"Tell me everything," I said. "None of this makes sense."

He leaned back and began his story.

Kumar's Backstory

I was born in Vijayawada into a middle-class family. My paternal grandfather passed away when my father was still young. On my mother's side, my grandfather was a doctor who once enjoyed significant wealth but lost everything after investing in a lottery ticket business. After abandoning that venture, he started a clinic near our home.

I completed my education in Vijayawada up to the 8th standard. Following my father's transfer, we moved to Vizag, where I completed my 9th standard. My brother, at the time, was repeating his 10th. It was in Vizag that I joined the school cricket team, sparking a lifelong passion for the game.

Later, my father was transferred to Bombay. Since housing wasn't immediately available, he sent the rest of us back to our village while he settled in the city. I completed my 10th standard in the village. Afterwards, my family moved to Bombay, leaving me in Vijayawada with my maternal grandfather's family so I could continue my studies.

I enrolled in Intermediate college, and during that time, I met Sneha—a classmate who lived near our clinic. We often saw each other from our terraces, and our bond began when she came to the clinic with a fever. We grew closer through combined study sessions. She even arranged for a rickshaw so we could commute to college together.

Our relationship deepened when I visited Bombay during the holidays. Upon returning, we shared our first hug. Despite our growing closeness, we stayed focused on our academics. Sneha often had lunch at our house—even though her family was strictly vegetarian, and ours was not. Unfortunately, this cultural difference became a barrier.

After Intermediate, I moved to Hyderabad to pursue my degree. Sneha's family, disapproving of our closeness, sent her to their native village and barred her from returning until she completed her studies.

A year later, we eloped to Hyderabad and got married. Over the next two years, she earned an RMP certification. After I completed my degree, we moved to Bombay. Sneha started working at a clinic, while I partnered with Kirit in a can manufacturing business.

During a visit to Hyderabad for my sister's wedding, Sneha's cousin tricked her into leaving me. Unbeknownst to me, she was pregnant at the time. Her sudden disappearance devastated me, plunging me into depression.

Sahithi, a close friend, helped me through this difficult period. We moved into a shared flat in Vikhroli, living as platonic companions. Later, I learned that Sneha had given birth to twins. I mistakenly assumed she had remarried, and eventually, I married Sahithi.

Upon hearing of my marriage, Sneha returned. Surprisingly, Sahithi welcomed her. We all began living together in Sahithi's home. Later, when Kirit, Mahira, and I started a hotel near Bombay Central, I asked Sneha to assist them.

Tragically, Sneha was involved in a fire accident that left our children motherless. Sahithi stepped in to care for the twins, and my mother arranged for Chitti, a domestic help, to support her.

Around this time, Sahithi, who worked as a typist at Godrej, was transferred to the typing pool and gradually began distancing herself from our lives.

Enter Loveleen

One evening, while returning from a client visit, a woman named Loveleen scraped my scooter with her car. I visited her interior design office the next day, and soon, Sahithi joined her firm. Loveleen promoted her to manager before relocating to Delhi.

At a gathering with her friends, Loveleen confided in me about her husband's dubious activities. I conducted my own investigation and confirmed her suspicions. To expose him, I devised a plan: I introduced Sunitha, who had recently survived an accident, to Loveleen's husband as a call girl—posing as a pimp myself.

Later, I rescued a woman named Dimple from a prostitution ring and brought her to Delhi. I used her to entrap Loveleen's husband and a minister in a bribery scandal.

With all the evidence, I informed Loveleen, who then urged me to present it to her father. The revelations led to the collapse of the Haryana government. When fresh elections were called, I helped Loveleen's father win. He became the Chief Minister.

As a token of appreciation, Loveleen gifted me a car, a bike, and a bungalow—which we converted into our office space. With this turning point, I co-founded a software company with a few trusted friends as partners.

Back in the Present

"So you got all of this just for helping with the elections?" I asked.

"You could say that," Kumar replied with a smirk. "But the software played a major role," he added, deftly dodging the specifics about the bungalow.

I gave him a look. "So, you're from Vijayawada. Sneha was too. You studied in Hyderabad, moved to Bombay, worked in a factory, married a Maharashtrian, met a Punjabi woman, and now you own all this?"

He laughed. "That's one way to sum it up."

"So, Loveleen was the key to everything?"

He nodded. "She definitely changed the game."

We eventually settled down to work on the hospital software. Kumar began by walking me through the development process. Together, we made detailed notes and organized the next steps.

"I'll upload everything to the server," he said. "You can access the files from your system. If you make any changes, just save them back. I'll start building the data tables."

With that, he left me alone in my new cabin and stepped out toward the parking lot.

Chapter 4

Boardroom Tensions & Strategic Unveiling

It was the day of the board meeting. All the partners had gathered in the boardroom when a sudden commotion outside caught our attention. Curious, we stepped out to find members of the press waiting, cameras flashing and videographers recording.

Kumar, calm as ever, stepped forward and addressed them. **"What can I do for you?"**

The journalists erupted with questions. Raising a hand, Kumar said firmly, **"One person at a time, please."**

One reporter stepped ahead. **"Is it true the minister invited you to Delhi for a software order?"**

Kumar nodded. **"Yes, we visited Delhi regarding a software order."**

"Do you have proof of the order?" another pressed.

Kumar replied, **"As the minister stated, the order details are confidential and cannot be disclosed."**

"How do we know you're not lying, then?" the reporter challenged, sensing an opportunity.

But Kumar was prepared. **"If you'd like to see the order, you'll need to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement. Once you do, we can show it to you."**

"I'll sign on behalf of everyone here," the journalist volunteered.

Kumar turned to his assistant. **"Loveleen, call our lawyer. Let's draft the NDA."**

He then looked back at the journalist, issuing a warning: **"Once signed, disclosing any information will make you liable for a fine of one lakh rupees, and possibly jail time, subject to court judgment. Think carefully before signing."**

For the next forty-five minutes—until the lawyer arrived—Kumar kept the journalist on edge, reiterating the legal consequences. When the lawyer finally appeared, Kumar briefed him, and the lawyer asked for a typewriter.

"Use the computer on Pauleen's desk. Print it in the server room," Kumar instructed.

The agreement was drafted, printed, and brought back. As Kumar handed it to the journalist, he gave one final reminder:

"Remember—disclose anything, and you're responsible."

The journalist scanned the document, then stepped back. **"We're convinced. You were there for the software order."**

His peers murmured discontent, but he simply said, **"Sign it if you want to see the order,"** and walked out. One by one, the others followed, quietly retreating to their chairs. I lingered near the door.

Sahithi turned to Kumar, clearly puzzled. **"What was that all about?"**

Kumar smiled slightly. **"A reverse sting operation. They came here trying to trap us or expose the minister. I turned the tables. Now they can't claim anything, and even if they do see the order, they're legally bound to stay silent. We win either way."**

Sahithi gestured around the office. **"So this is what they gave you for helping them with this setup?"**

"Partly. When powerful people need to protect themselves, they do what they must."

He noticed me still standing. **"Nandini, come in. Everyone, this is Nandini—she's from the hospital we're building software for. She studied Hospital Administration in the U.S. and is currently a trainee."**

I offered a polite greeting. **"Hi, everyone."**

Kumar brought the meeting back on track. **"Now, onto point two: should we use the house between our office and Loveleen's as a residence or reserve it for future office expansion?"**

Nishitha said, **"We've already started converting it into a residence."**

Sahithi added, **"I've decided to move in. I've even finalized the school for the kids nearby."**

Loveleen concluded, **"This office space will serve us well for the next five years at least. Let's proceed with using the house for residential purposes."**

Everyone voiced their agreement with a unanimous, **"Aye."**

"Next agenda: marketing," Kumar said, turning to Mahira. **"What's your take?"**

Mahira responded, **"Our target clients aren't fully aware of the benefits of computerization. That might explain our slow sales."**

After a brief pause, I raised my hand. **"May I speak?"**

"Please do," Kumar encouraged.

I shared my perspective. **"Awareness is part of the issue, but timing is critical. Your sales team may be approaching clients too late in their financial year, after budgets are finalized. If you engage them earlier, they can allocate funds for capital expenditures like software. You need to show them not just the features, but the long-term financial benefits and ROI."**

Kumar turned to me. **"So the issue is more about budget planning?"**

"It's a major factor, especially for institutions where budgeting happens annually with board approvals."

Mahira nodded. **"Agreed. Larger firms do require early engagement. But family-owned or mid-sized businesses are different. Take your old factory, for example. Why did you opt for software there?"**

"We used it because Mr. Kathuria offered it for free. It gave him time to debug it while we used it," Kumar said. Mahira smiled. **"So... should we consider offering free trials?"**

"Maybe, but only if we have a version that can be time-locked or feature-restricted," Kumar mused.

Mahira suggested, **"We could use the same trial version you used at the factory."**

"That's on you to market. Can you convert trials into paying customers?" Kumar asked.

"I'll need to assess with my team," Mahira admitted.

"Do that," Kumar agreed. Then he turned to me again. **"Nandini, your thoughts?"**

"You could develop the hospital software into a commercial product. My family is planning a hospital in Hyderabad. My cousin, a heart surgeon, will lead it. I pursued my degree to manage it once it's operational. When it's ready, I'd prefer to purchase your software outright, not just trial it."

Kumar nodded. **"If you need financial assistance for your hospital, let me know. We have access to investors interested in healthcare."**

This surprised me. He hadn't previously mentioned investment capabilities. I treaded carefully. **"I'll speak to my father about it."**

Sahithi then asked, **"How do you find such investors?"**

"We know people looking to convert black money into legitimate investments. Hospitals are attractive options."

"Can you really secure funding?" she pressed.

"I'm confident," he replied.

Nishitha shifted gears. **"Are you ready to settle the interior decorating bills?"**

"Yes. Raise the bills and I'll clear them—or convert the amount into capital shares for your firm," Kumar offered. Loveleen nodded her approval.

Sahithi wasn't done. **"Are you sure you can manage ongoing capital needs?"**

Kumar smiled reassuringly. **"We're liquid right now. I can infuse more money or take a loan. I'm also returning the amount I borrowed for the kids' future."**

He left the room and returned with bond certificates worth five lakh rupees, handing them to Sahithi. **"Use the interest for their education."**

He spoke with such nonchalance, it felt like a routine gesture. Yet, there was a depth of emotion beneath the surface.

Seeing no further discussion points, Kumar asked, **"Shall we adjourn?"**

Everyone agreed. **"Aye."**

He instructed Pauleen to document and distribute the minutes.

Then, smiling, he said, **"Let's go see the house. Some of you haven't visited yet."**

We all walked over to the newly renovated residence. Those seeing it for the first time were visibly impressed.

"We'll need housekeeping staff," Kumar mentioned. **"I'll assign some of the office cleaners here as well."**

Once everyone gathered at the back exit, Kumar opened the door, revealing a beachside setup—a surprise party arranged for the partners.

"Someone go call the others from the office," he said, smiling.

I'm not sure why I've become so involved in their business. Initially, I only intended to learn how they were developing software relevant to the hospital project my father and uncle were planning. That's why I chose a trainee position here rather than assisting with the construction directly.

Now, I understand that software is bound to shape the future. There's fear that technology might displace human workers, but I've always believed it won't replace humans—it will simply shift the nature of work. Less-skilled labor may be replaced by a more knowledgeable workforce capable of using advanced tools. Jobs won't vanish; rather, workers will transition into new roles, requiring them to upgrade their skills. This shift can enhance personal growth, boost income, and improve educational opportunities for their children. Governments have limited capacity to intervene—self-improvement remains essential.

Kumar recently mentioned providing financial support for our hospital. Do we really need that? Can he genuinely offer it? His company seems small, with a modest staff. They're just starting out, and this hospital project appears to be their first major venture. His developers lack experience, evident in Kumar personally initiating the project. Even the marketing director struggled to articulate their software's value during the board meeting. How can someone who doesn't fully understand his own company's operations provide financial backing?

Kumar's confidence seems rooted in financial sources he's connected with, and stories about how he acquired his properties suggest he may have come into money quickly. If those stories are true, he could potentially support the project. Still, involving outsiders could introduce complications in day-to-day operations, making management more difficult. In the long run, I'll be responsible for managing the hospital. I need to weigh this carefully. First, I'll discuss our financial needs with my father, and based on that, decide whether to pursue further discussions with Kumar.

Kumar hosted a housewarming ceremony for his new bungalow, where he and his family planned to move. He invited relatives, friends, and his parents for the occasion. The event began with traditional rituals in the morning, followed by a separate evening party for business guests.

The housewarming day started with a traditional puja, followed by the Satyanarayana Vratha Puja, a customary ritual in Andhra Pradesh. After the ceremonies, a vegetarian lunch was served. Since the ritual required a vegetarian meal, the family scheduled a non-vegetarian party for the next evening.

Many relatives attended, including some who couldn't make it to Kumar's wedding. It became a reason for them to visit Bombay, see the new bungalow, and tour the adjoining office. The home's grandeur impressed everyone—it resembled something out of a movie.

The following day, Kumar brought his cousins from Andhra to my room. After knocking and entering, he introduced them and encouraged them to ask questions. They asked about my background—where I was from, why I chose hospital management, my plans after training, and whether I intended to return to Hyderabad or remain here.

Interestingly, Kumar had never asked about my personal background before. I shared that I was originally from Guntur, but we moved to Hyderabad in 1986, where my father, a businessman, settled. I pursued Hospital Management in New York, returned to Hyderabad, and am helping my father and uncle build a hospital for my cousin, a heart surgeon. Before launching the project, I opted to gain practical experience by training at a hospital in Bombay.

As I recounted this, Kumar didn't seem to recognize any connection. From what he had previously shared, it seemed we had no prior links.

That evening, Kumar hosted a grand party for his business guests. Among them was the Maharashtra Sena Pramukh, who had recommended Kumar's firm for the hospital software project. He approached me to ask about my background and inquired about our hospital administrator. I responded respectfully, aware of his influence and that he had entrusted Kumar with a key project aligned with upcoming elections.

Kumar later took the Sena Pramukh to the bar before moving on to greet the President and Vice President of a courier company, introduced by Mahira. I spent time with his cousins, chatting in Telugu to maintain privacy.

Kumar then introduced Mr. Lal, the President, to Shakha Pramukh Mr. Deshmukh, who shared how Kumar had helped their group during the riots and narrowly escaped the Air India building bombing. Kumar elaborated briefly but changed the topic when Mr. Lal asked to see Loveleen's home décor. Kumar obliged and left with him.

Soon after, another guest, Mr. Deshpande, approached me to discuss building a hospital for the poor. I explained our own project and its arrangements. He listened attentively and left after speaking briefly with Kumar.

I later noticed Kumar stepping outside, likely to buy cigarettes. He returned half an hour later and found Loveleen sitting with the courier company's Vice President. He told her a servant was looking for her, prompting her to leave. I found myself wondering how he knew who was at her house.

Then Mahira approached him, and they walked toward the seashore, probably to smoke. I watched from the gate as he lit her cigarette and one for himself. After some time, they returned, and Kumar fetched a drink and sat at a table. Mahira joined him, dropping a packet onto his lap. Kumar took out a cigarette, lit it, and Mahira took a drag before handing it back. Their conversation seemed serious.

I observed from a distance, unable to hear them. Despite Kumar's wealth—two bungalows in Juhu, a growing software business, and numerous connections—he looked burdened. I couldn't help but wonder what was troubling him.

Eventually, he went inside. I waited a bit, but when he didn't return, I decided to skip the hostel and returned to my room in the office to reflect on the evening.

The next day, I went looking for Kumar but was told by Pauleen he had gone to the hospital. I had hoped to discuss the hospital application with him. She promised to remind him once he returned.

Later, I saw him return, but he left again after a phone call—this time with Sunitha. Curious, I returned to Pauleen, who told me they had gone to the courier company after receiving a call from its Vice President. When Kumar returned hours later, he looked pleased—he had secured a new project and immediately called Rajesh to discuss it.

When Rajesh came out, I asked what the project was about. He explained that it involved data transfer across the courier company's branches. Realizing Kumar would be occupied, I rejoined the developers to continue working on our hospital software.

The next day, Kumar returned with Sunitha and her luggage. It seemed she was moving in, now with a room in his house. Their relationship intrigued me—very close, but not clearly familial. Kumar is from Andhra, and Sunitha is from Tamil Nadu. While I had seen relatives from Madras before, none seemed particularly familiar with her.

Later, Kumar brought her to the office and arranged a room for her. Shortly after, he took Sahithi to a doctor. When they returned, Sahithi looked unwell and needed help entering the house. I wondered if it was an abortion, but there was no confirmation.

Meanwhile, Rajesh informed Kumar that the courier company's application was ready. Kumar asked him to take Mahira for a demo. They left on his bike.

Later, I stood at Pauleen's desk for a chat. Kumar emerged, looking as though he'd just woken up. He headed to his house, then to Loveleen's, and later returned with a young girl—shabbily dressed but from a seemingly respectable background. I couldn't help but wonder who she was.

Later, I learned her name was Leena. When she landed in Bombay, her guardians died in an accident. She had been taken to the Sena Shakha, and Kumar brought her from there. He then took her to his parents' house in Wadala.

Kumar called me and two developers into his cabin. He asked for their names—Upendra and Sawant—which surprised me. Then he asked about pending tasks based on my earlier notes. We spent an hour discussing necessary changes, and he asked us to focus on them.

He turned to me and asked, "Nandini, how's the work progressing on building the hospital?"

I replied, "They've acquired the land and plan to start construction after consulting their guru for an auspicious date."

"Are they inviting anyone for the foundation ceremony?" he asked.

I said, "If you're interested in visiting Hyderabad, I can arrange a tour with my father."

He nodded, "Please do. I'd like to review the site and the plans. Incidentally, the Shakha Pramukh also wants to build a hospital for the poor in Bombay."

I remarked, "That's commendable, but ours isn't a charitable hospital."

"I understand. If your father can assist, they're willing to pay a consultation fee. They may even provide financial support for your hospital," he said.

"I'll confirm the date and let you know," I replied.

He thanked me, and I returned to my room to resume work.

Kumar must have been concerned about the kids, as he brought home two tiny Great Dane puppies—a male and a female. He asked Chitty to keep them in a box for now, and we're planning to build a doghouse in the backyard. He named them Sonu and Monu.

Kumar also installed gates between the three properties, allowing the puppies to roam freely.

Rajesh returned after finishing the courier company project. Meanwhile, our hospital software is progressing well and should be ready soon.

Dad called to say the muhurta for the hospital's foundation-laying ceremony is set for next Monday. I informed Kumar, and after checking with Sahithi and Sunitha, he agreed to join us. He's booked the first flight on Sunday morning for our trip to Hyderabad.

Chapter 5

We caught the flight and landed in Hyderabad. After collecting our luggage, I began scanning the area. "My father said he'd send a car," I told Kumar while looking around. Instead, I spotted my cousin Rohan. I walked over, hugged him, and asked, "What are you doing here? I didn't expect you to pick me up."

Rohan smiled. "I came to see you. It's been a while."

I introduced him to Kumar.

"Glad to meet you. I've heard a lot about you from Nandini," Rohan said.

Kumar gave me a curious look.

"All good things, don't worry," Rohan added. "Let's go."

We got into the car. I sat next to Rohan and chatted with him as he drove us to our bungalow in Jubilee Hills. The area felt quiet, with only a few houses scattered around.

"This area feels pretty isolated," Kumar remarked.

"Don't let that fool you," Rohan said. "The surrounding land has been bought by VIPs. This place is up-and-coming."

Kumar nodded, looking at the bungalow. "Nice building."

"It's nice, but nothing compared to what you have in Bombay," I said.

Rohan gave me a questioning look. I clarified, "Kumar has two bungalows in Juhu, both facing the sea."

Rohan asked, "What do you do with two bungalows?"

"One is for our office, and the other is for living," Kumar explained.

I added, "He also has two Great Dane puppies. They're three months old and might be sent for training. They roam freely between three properties."

"What's the third property?" Rohan asked.

"That belongs to his business partner, Loveleen, who lives next door," I replied.

When we reached the house, Kumar was shown to the guest room. After settling in, he joined us in the living room where my father, Subba Rao, welcomed him warmly.

Dad shared the hospital plans and said, "Nandini contributed a lot to the design. Her studies have been useful." He asked Kumar how the kids were doing.

"They're doing fine," Kumar replied.

The two of them spoke for over an hour, mostly about Kumar's background. Eventually, Dad suggested we all go for lunch.

At the dining table, we ate quietly—my father believes meals shouldn't be interrupted with conversation. Afterward, Kumar excused himself for a cigarette. Rohan and I followed him outside. Kumar lit a cigarette, and Rohan took one too. They smoked in silence until Kumar asked, "Where are you working now, Rohan?" "I'm working with a hospital. My dream is to have my own someday," Rohan said.

"How long until it's built?" Kumar asked.

Conservatively, about nine months to a year," Rohan responded.

"So, by the end of next year?"

"Hopefully. It might take longer to get all the equipment, but by 1995, it should be running."

After they finished, we went back inside. I suggested we watch a movie and asked Kumar, "Are you okay with a Telugu film?"

"I'm fine with any language. It's been a while since I saw a Telugu movie. The last one was with Sneha in college," Kumar said with a faint smile.

Sensing emotion, I quickly said, "Let's go now or we'll miss the beginning."

We went to see *Mayalodu*, starring Rajendra Prasad. Rohan got us tickets, and I sat between them. Throughout the movie, I whispered bits of commentary to Kumar about the actors and the plot. After it ended, I asked, "How did you like it?"

"Excellent," he said with a smile.

Later, Rohan took us to a restaurant.

"What would you like?" he asked Kumar.

"Just tea," Kumar replied.

I ordered dosas for both of us. While we ate, Kumar sipped his tea. I ordered ice cream afterward, but Kumar excused himself, saying he'd wait outside.

Five minutes later, we joined him.

"Why did you step out?" Rohan asked.

"Just needed a smoke," Kumar said.

We drove back home. Rohan dropped us off, saying he had work, and I went to change. Meanwhile, my father and Kumar continued talking. The conversation turned to politics and the recent failure of the Telugu Desam Party. Although Kumar wasn't deeply involved in Andhra politics, he spoke about national trends and how the Sena might gain power in Maharashtra. They discussed leadership, foreign policy, and threats from Pakistan.

Noticing Kumar growing weary, I suggested we step outside. He thanked my father, and we sat on a bench in the garden.

"I thought you were getting bored," I said.

"I wasn't bored, just needed a smoke," he replied, lighting another cigarette.

That evening, Rohan returned, and we made plans to go out for dinner. We chose a new restaurant near Jubilee Hills. After a couple of drinks and dinner, I drove us home. Kumar seemed unusually quiet. Earlier, when I had shown him my room, he had left quickly. Something was bothering him.

Later that night, I knocked on his door. He opened it and was sitting on the bed.

"What's going on?" I asked, sitting beside him.

He handed me the book he was reading—a mystery novel.

"Earlier, in my room, you said something strange. What did you mean?"

Kumar hesitated. "When I walked into your room, I felt like I'd been there before... that we'd spent time on your bed."

I was surprised but smiled. "Then why don't we spend some time there now?"

He shook his head. "It didn't end well for me. You left me heartbroken. It took a long time to recover."

"Why are you so afraid of heartbreak? Just enjoy the moment," I said.

"When Sneha left, I was devastated. Sahithi helped me rebuild. But now... she's struggling too. I don't think she can help me again. I can't take another heartbreak."

"Then why start a relationship with Sunitha?" I asked gently.

"Our relationship is different—no expectations. We understand each other. The only issue we had was about Mahira, and we resolved that. We live together but keep our distance. The only threat is jealousy."

"I won't leave you," I promised.

He smiled faintly. "Let's keep things professional. We've got a lot of work ahead, and I don't want complications."

"Okay," I said. "But I'll give you time to think it over. Good night."

Lying in bed, I thought about his fear. It wasn't losing me he feared—it was losing Sahithi's support. I needed to show him that I'd be there for him. If we had such a connection, who visited that day he mentioned? Was he talking about when I had my accident and slipped into a coma? Did he think I left him then? I couldn't tell what was real or a dream. Could we have shared the same dream?

The next morning, I knocked on Kumar's door.
"Get ready, we have to go," I said.

"I'll be ready in 10 minutes," he replied.

He quickly showered, changed, and came downstairs. I handed him a cup of coffee. Dressed in traditional attire, I was already ready. He took the coffee and sipped it. After finishing, I took the cup and went to the kitchen.

"Do you want breakfast?" I asked when I returned.

"There's no urgency. I just had coffee," he replied.

Rohan arrived, urging us to leave.

"Is no one else coming?" Kumar asked.

"Just the three of us. The others have already left," Rohan replied.

We drove to the hospital site where the *bhoomi puja* was being performed. We stood back as the *purohit* conducted the rituals. After the ceremony, we returned home for breakfast and tea.

While we sat in the hall, someone switched on the news.
"In a shocking incident in Delhi, Haryana CM's son-in-law, Gurvinder Singh, was shot dead outside his home. He was declared dead at the scene," the anchor reported.

Kumar stood up and called Loveleen.

"I just saw the news. Is it true?" he asked. After listening, he continued, "What are you going to do?... I'm starting now."

Standing beside him, I asked, "Do you need to go?"

"I have to go to Delhi," he said.
"Why?"

"Loveleen's husband was murdered."

"Her husband?" I echoed.

"Yes. She needs help getting her affairs in order. It wasn't business rivalry—it was political. She asked me to come. Can you arrange tickets?"

"I'm coming with you," I said.

"What will you do there?"

"I want to be with you."

"Alright. Use my card and book the tickets."

I called the agent and booked two tickets to Delhi. Kumar packed quickly. "I'm ready," he said. "I'll be ready in five minutes," I replied.

We went to the airport, collected the tickets, checked in, and waited at the gate.
"What is your real relationship with Loveleen?" I asked.

"She's a partner in our firm," he replied.

"That's all?"

"Yes. She's a friend. Her family supported us financially. Without that, I couldn't have started the company."
"So, no physical relationship?"

"None. I never imagined that with her."

He paused. "Except with Sunitha, I haven't been involved with anyone."

"Can I believe you?"

"If you want, I'll swear on anyone you choose."

"No need. Your word is enough. I just don't understand your devotion to her."

"Some things can't be explained. Like our relationship—what is it?"

I think we're friends."

Boarding was announced. We entered the aircraft and took our seats. I held his hand. He didn't pull away.

When lunch was served, I let go, collected my tray, and ate. He did the same. After landing in Delhi, we collected our baggage. A driver waved at us.

Kumar approached him. "How come you're here?"

"Madam called. She said you were coming too and asked me to wait for you if you arrived first."

He loaded the luggage. We waited as Loveleen's flight landed. When she arrived, she looked at me questioningly.

"Drop me at my parents' house first," she told the driver, "Then take them to the flat."

"I'll call when I'm free," she said before entering.

At the flat—clean and well-kept—we dropped our bags in the bedroom. The phone rang.

"Be at Guru's house in half an hour. Wait outside," Loveleen said.

We went to Guru's bungalow and waited. Loveleen arrived with Dhruv. Kumar took the baby as we went inside. Guru's body was placed on a pedestal in the hall, surrounded by mourners. Loveleen stood silently by the head of the body.

Someone asked for the baby. Kumar handed Dhruv over. They paid respects and returned him.

I placed a garland on Guru's body on Loveleen's behalf. An official from the CM's office arrived and did the same.

The body was then taken to the crematorium. Kumar joined the procession with Dhruv. I stayed with Loveleen.

Later, Kumar returned and handed Dhruv to Loveleen. She went inside. Kumar signaled for me to be with her. I followed.

They lit a lamp in front of Guru's photo. I helped seat the guests and handed Dhruv to Kumar, who rocked him to sleep while sipping tea. He seemed used to this.

By 8 PM, visitors were still paying their respects. Loveleen played the grieving widow well, though I knew her feelings were elsewhere. I handed Dhruv to her and followed her to the room. She fed and rocked him to sleep.

Kumar returned. When Dhruv woke, Loveleen took him again. Kumar asked me to take food to her. I returned to find him quietly eating in a corner.

"Loveleen said we should go back to the flat. A family member is staying with her. She asked us to come tomorrow after 11," I told him. "Does she need the car?" "No. Take the driver with us."

"Inform her," he said.

I found Vishal, informed Loveleen, and returned. "Did you eat?" he asked.

"Yes. Let's go," I replied.

We went to the flat, and Kumar asked Vishal to help separate the two single beds that had been pushed together. After taking a bath, Kumar returned, chose a bed, and sat down. I sat on the other.

Vishal came in and asked, "Do you need anything?"

Kumar replied, "Please bring me a cup of tea."

I added, "One for me too."

"I'll prepare the tea," Vishal said and went to the kitchen.

Kumar moved to the hall, sat on the sofa, and lit a cigarette. Vishal soon returned with three cups of tea and placed them on the table.

"Nandini, come have your tea!" Kumar called out.

"I'm coming," I replied.

Vishal took a cigarette from the pack and lit it. I came into the hall, picked up my cup, and returned to the bedroom when I saw both of them smoking.

After finishing his tea and cigarette, Kumar returned to the bedroom with a book in hand. He placed the cups on the nightstand, woke me up to drink coffee, picked up his cup, and went back to the hall. He lit another cigarette and sipped his coffee.

By the time he came back, I had finished my coffee and gone back to sleep. He woke me again and said, "Vishal is getting breakfast. Get up and have a bath."

Reluctantly, I said, "Let me sleep a little longer."

"If you came with me just to sleep, you have the whole day for that," he replied.

Grumbling, I took a towel and went to the bathroom.

Fifteen minutes later, I was dressed and sitting beside him.

"Are you bored here?" he asked.

"Not bored—just a little cold. We didn't bring warm clothes," I replied.

"We'll get something on the way to Guru's house. It's not too cold yet, but it will be."

When Vishal brought breakfast, we ate and got ready.

"Vishal, take us to the cloth market," Kumar said.

He then turned to me and asked, "Sweater or jacket?"

"A jacket would be good," I replied.

Kumar ended up buying both a sweater and a jacket for me.

At Guru's house, Loveleen handed Dhruv to Kumar to take to the crematorium to collect the ashes. After returning, he handed Dhruv to me to give back to Loveleen. I did so and came back.

"What's going on?" he whispered.

"There's talk about Guru's inheritance," I replied. "After announcing her pregnancy last year, no one dared question it. But now, people are whispering about Dhruv getting his father's share. I think Loveleen came to ensure that happens."

"I think so too," he said. "I don't know his family situation—if there are siblings or others entitled to the inheritance. I haven't had a chance to speak with Loveleen. Can you ask her to give me five minutes?"

"I will," I said and went to find her.

When I looked for Kumar later, he wasn't in the hall. I eventually found him in the car, smoking with Vishal.

"I was looking all over for you," I said.

"What's the matter?"

"Loveleen told us to return to the flat. She'll call when she needs us."

"Can we leave now?"

"Yes," I replied, getting into the car. Vishal drove us back.

We returned to the flat and sat on the sofa. Vishal left to get lunch. Kumar remembered he hadn't called Bombay yet. First, he called Sahithi.

"How is everything going?" he asked.

"Everything's fine. When are you coming back?" she asked.

"I'm not sure yet. I'll let you know."

Next, he called the office and spoke to Sunitha. He checked on her work and asked her to keep an eye on the developers since I wasn't there. Then he hung up.

"Want to go on a city tour?" he asked.

"Let's go," I said.

He asked Vishal to show us Delhi. We returned after 8 p.m.

“How was the trip?” he asked.

“It was good. When do we go to see the Taj Mahal?”

“Soon. When we find time.”

Vishal went to get dinner. I had a bath, changed into a nightdress, had dinner, and lay on the bed.

In the middle of the night, I woke up and went to lie beside Kumar. I got up early in the morning and returned to my bed—let him think it was a dream.

Kumar came and woke me up. “Get up. We’re going to the Taj Mahal today.”

“Yay, Taj Mahal!” I cheered, heading to the bathroom.

After I finished, he took his bath and got ready. Vishal had already brought breakfast. After we ate, Kumar made tea and brought three cups to the hall. I came out dressed, and he reminded me to be ready soon.

We spent the entire day in Agra and had dinner at a restaurant before returning.

That night, Kumar had a bath, changed, and lay on the bed reading. I lay beside him, but in the middle of the night, he gently woke me.

“Go back to your bed,” he said.

I obeyed.

We spent the rest of the week visiting various places around Delhi. Every night, I tried to create closeness, hoping it would stir old memories, but he remained physically distant. I didn’t expect anything more—just something to remind him of what we once had.

One morning, he brought three cups of coffee—one for Vishal and two for us. He woke me to drink mine.

“Where shall we go today?” he asked.

“Let’s ask Vishal,” I suggested.

He stepped out to talk to Vishal, and just then, the doorbell rang. It was Loveleen’s family driver.

He told Kumar to come with him—alone.

Kumar asked him to wait and quickly took a bath, had breakfast, and left with him.

Two hours later, he returned.

“What’s the update?” I asked.

“Our work here is done. We’re returning to Bombay tomorrow,” he replied.

“What’s in your hand?”

“These are the property papers for the building next to Loveleen’s.”

“What are we going to do with that building?” I asked.

Back in Bombay

After returning to Bombay, I distanced myself from Kumar. It seemed he either didn’t remember our relationship or preferred to pretend it never existed. If he truly didn’t recall, why did he act like we shared something intimate? Why was he afraid I’d break his heart?

He didn’t know I had been in a coma after an accident. I stayed in New York afterward to complete my studies. I’m not sure what his sister’s mother-in-law might’ve told him, but is he really the same Kumar I once knew? From his side, our connection seems lost.

The hospital software is now complete, and we’re implementing it in phases. I’ve been working from the hospital, coordinating with the developers and making the necessary updates. I hadn’t seen Kumar in over a month. Then, I received an invitation to his children’s birthday celebration.

After finishing work, I changed and went to Kumar’s house.

"Are you angry with me?" he asked.

"Why would I be?" I replied.

"I haven't seen you in two months."

"I've been busy managing hospital operations and software development. I barely had time to call anyone."

"That's okay. I'm glad you made it to the party. How's the construction going in Hyderabad?"

"It'll be done in two months. Equipment will arrive in three."

"Why three months?"

"We ordered in advance. If we wait, vendors might hike the prices."

"How are the finances?"

"No major issues for now. We'll see once the hospital starts running."

"Don't hesitate to approach me if you need help."

"My father believes you'll step in if needed, so he isn't too worried."

"That's all I want. Come, I'll introduce you to the hospital management team."

He introduced me to a group of clients in the backyard. He described me as the architect of our hospital software and mentioned my background in hospital management from the USA. The moment he mentioned that, everyone became interested and started asking questions.

One administrator wanted more details. I took him to Kumar, who explained that we tailor the software based on each hospital's workflow. The administrator seemed satisfied.

"If you'd like to see how the software functions, speak with Nandini. She can arrange a tour," Kumar said.

The administrator agreed. I asked him to call me so we could plan the visit.

A Week Later

Kumar called the hospital and asked about the administrator.

"He came, saw the demo, and was impressed," I told him. "He said he'd call you once he gets approval."

"I'll wait for his call. How are things in Hyderabad?"

"Going well. I'll call you for the opening."

"I guess that'll take six more months?"

"Yes."

"Visit sometime. We're shifting houses next week. Join us for the housewarming."

"I'll come."

Later, Kumar called again.

"Where's the list of computer requirements? If you delay, so will the order."

"I'll send it to Mahira now," I replied.

But I decided to deliver it in person. When I arrived, Kumar stood, shook my hand, and took the list.

"You look a little different," I said.

"It's been a stressful week. My father had a heart attack."

"You should've brought him to our hospital."

"He was taken to Sion Hospital—closer. He's recovering and will be discharged soon."

He reviewed the list.

"I'll arrange for the delivery."

As I got up to leave, he thought I was coming for another handshake. But I stepped closer, held his hand, kissed him on the cheek, and walked away.

Final Updates

Later, he called from Bombay.

"We're having a Sena meet at one of our bungalows. I'll be delayed by a week. The computers are on their way. I'll send the networking guys soon."

"Okay. I'll have everything ready."

Ten days later, he called again.

"Sorry for the delay. I'll be there in a day or two. The networking team is on the way. Tell me what else you need."

"Nothing else for now. We'll talk when you arrive."

"Okay," he said, and ended the call.

Kumar called and informed me that he had booked his flight tickets and asked me to arrange a suite or a double room at a nearby hotel. For a moment, I wondered if he meant for me to stay with him. Then I reconsidered—he was probably bringing someone, maybe Sunitha.

I drove to the airport to receive them. When they came out, I was shocked. Kumar was not with Sunitha—but with **Loveleen** and **Dhruv**.

I let Kumar place the luggage in the trunk, and he came to sit beside me. Loveleen, holding Dhruv, got into the back seat. I began driving toward the hotel I had booked for them.

"This hotel isn't the closest to the hospital," I explained, "but it's the best nearby. Don't worry about transport—I'll pick you up and drop you daily."

"Thanks," Kumar replied.

They went in to check in while I parked the car and joined them at the reception. We headed to their suite—two bedrooms and a living area, fully furnished.

"Is this room okay?" I asked.

"It'll do," Kumar said, glancing at Loveleen. She nodded.

I sat on the sofa, glancing at sleeping Dhruv. I didn't want to disturb him.

"Would you like a drink or something cold?" Kumar asked.

"No thanks," I replied.

Kumar took out his laptop and placed it on the table.

"Shall we go to the hospital?" I asked.

Kumar turned to Loveleen. "Get some rest. I'll visit the hospital and be back soon."

"Come back early," she said.

He picked up his laptop, and we left for the hospital.

At the Hospital

Our first stop was my father's office. He was in a meeting but welcomed us in and introduced the people he was speaking with—they were discussing plans to set up an electricity generation unit. The team had secured funding from a U.S. company. Dad introduced Kumar as the software developer from Bombay who had also supplied the computers.

Mr. Reddy, the team head, discussed their plans and financial setup. This reminded me of the time I had my accident, and Dad had taken me to the U.S.

Afterwards, Kumar and I went to check the network and hardware installations. He tested the laptop connections, examined the server placement, and confirmed that the networking was satisfactory.

"I'll install the server myself," he said. "The rest of the systems will be installed by the technician arriving tomorrow."

He mapped out which parts of the software would be installed where. We returned to my cabin and sat down. I ordered tea.

"How are you?" he finally asked.

"I'm fine. But why did you bring Loveleen?"

"We're planning to expand. I want to open a small sales office here—for both software and hardware."

"If you're looking for a single office, I might be able to get you a room on this campus," I suggested.

"I'm not sure that would work. Clients might not want to come all the way here," he replied.

"We can provide a room with a phone connection. What else would you need?"

"I'm thinking of setting up an office where one of our developers can also live."

"If it's someone from your team, that's fine. But if it's a local salesman, you wouldn't need to provide accommodation."

"True. Also, we're exploring the idea of launching an interior decorating firm here—that's Loveleen's area."

I was surprised. "You think there's a market for that here?"

"Hyderabad's IT industry is going to change soon. I'd like to meet Mr. Naidu."

"I think Rohan knows someone in his family. I'll try to arrange a meeting."

Our tea arrived. After we finished, I asked, "Want to go somewhere?"

"Where can we go?"

"We can't take Loveleen—she has Dhruv. Let's go to Rohan's flat. It's nearby. I'll get the keys."

I collected the keys and returned, waving them at Kumar. "Let's go. It's just a two-minute walk."

We reached a new apartment building, took the lift to the top floor, and I unlocked the flat.

"Wow," Kumar said, impressed. "This is a great apartment. We should get one like this."

"If you want one, I'll book it. This is Dad's project."

"Is there anything available on the lower floors?"

"Most people prefer higher floors, but we have units on the first floor."

"Can we see one?"

"There might be work going on, but let's check."

We saw that flooring was being laid in one of the first-floor units. Kumar wanted Loveleen to see it too. "I'll arrange it," I said.

Back at the top-floor flat, I told him to relax on the sofa while I brought out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. I returned with snacks, poured us each a drink, and we started sipping.

Kumar seemed distracted. Though he responded with the occasional "hmm" or "aha," he kept looking at me more than listening.

Unexpected Company

The doorbell rang—it was Rohan.

"Sorry I couldn't meet you at the hospital. I had a surgery," he said.

"No problem," Kumar replied. "How's the hospital running?"

"You should ask her—she's managing it," Rohan teased.

"If I ask her, she'll talk about everything but the hospital," Kumar joked.

"We've only opened the emergency and OT departments. Once your software is up and running, we'll launch the others."

"Sorry for the delay," Kumar said. "A Sena meeting was held at our bungalows. I had to be there."

"How did it go?"

"They'll win this election. Not sure about the next one. I told Nandini I want to meet Mr. Naidu. But first, I need more data for our prediction software."

"We'll see what we can do," Rohan said.

We discussed Andhra politics. Rohan was well-informed, and I joined in too.

"Let's go for dinner," Rohan suggested. "Then I'll drop you at the hotel."

Kumar called Loveleen and told her to order room service.

Exploring Hyderabad

The next morning at 8 a.m., I went to the hotel. Kumar, Loveleen, and Dhruv were ready. I dropped Kumar at the hospital and took Loveleen to see potential office spaces and some land near our house.

Later, Kumar asked, "How did it go?"

Loveleen replied, "We saw several properties. With the current demand, we can get good business in interior decorating. Nandini showed me a plot near her house—we should buy it. Also, there's a flat available in that same building on a different floor. We should purchase that too."

"We'll talk to the builder," Kumar said. Then turning to me, "I've finished setting up the server. Shall we check the rest of the systems?"

I asked Loveleen, "Will you be comfortable here?"

"Yes," she said.

We left and checked the installations. I asked the staff to test the application before finalizing everything.

Later, I suggested, "Can we move Loveleen to Rohan's flat?"

"Good idea," Kumar said. I gave him the keys. He pocketed them, lifted Dhruv, and told Loveleen to come with him.

Kumar returned, and we continued working until 6:30 p.m., assigning systems to staff. Then we returned to my cabin for tea.

"Let's go to Rohan's flat," Kumar said and called to inform Loveleen.

While walking, I asked, "What's your relationship with Loveleen?"

"I'd say I'm her bodyguard."

"I thought you'd call her your good friend."

"What's the fun in saying what you expect?" he grinned.

"Then what's your story?"

"She hit my scooter. That's how it began. Later, I helped her do a sting operation on her husband. It helped her father win the election. After that, I started the software company with her support."

"When we have more time, tell me the full story."

In the lift, I asked again, "What's your real relationship with Loveleen?"

"Like with you—I have a life connection with her too."

"So, did you reject her, like me?"

"That kind of situation never came between us."

That Night

Loveleen opened the door when we arrived. Dhruv ran to me, and I picked him up and sat on the sofa. Nandini smiled and said, "Tell me your story."

I brought out the bottle from last night. Only half was gone. She fetched snacks and poured drinks.

"I don't know if Loveleen wants to hear it again," Kumar said.

"I've heard it before, but I don't mind," Loveleen replied.

"Let me check if Rohan is coming," I said and called the hospital.

"He already left," they told me.

Just then, the doorbell rang. Rohan entered, holding a food bag. "I brought something to munch on—Chicken 65 and more."

"How did you know we'd need this?" I laughed.

"I have a sixth sense. Get me a glass."

"Yours is here," I said, handing it over.

We all sat down. "Kumar, start from the beginning," Rohan said.

Kumar began narrating his journey from Vijayawada to Vizag, his teenage years, studies, Sneha, and how he eventually met Sahithi. He described the tragedies, how Sneha passed away, and how Sahithi raised the children. Then he narrated the chance encounter with Loveleen—her car grazing his scooter, the visit to her office, her involvement with his family, and the political sting operation that changed their lives.

Eventually, Loveleen's father became CM, and as gratitude, they gifted Kumar a car, bike, and bungalow—his startup was born.

We finished one bottle, and Nandini brought another. Kumar skipped the part about being drugged by Loveleen but mentioned how she had helped him build everything.

Rohan asked, "So you're the Haryana CM's daughter?"

Loveleen nodded.

Looking at the time, Rohan called the hospital and had dinner delivered.

After dinner and more conversation, it was past midnight. We started a Q&A session.

When it was time to sleep, I said I'd sleep with Loveleen. Rohan offered his room to Kumar and said he'd take the sofa.

"I'm more used to the sofa," Kumar said.

So, Kumar took the sofa, and Rohan went to his room.

Kumar knocked on the bedroom door.

Loveleen replied, "Come in."

Kumar opened the door and asked, "Did you wake up?"

"Just now," she said.

"Come then, we need to go to the hotel and change."

"I'll drop you," I offered.

He declined. "You need to get to the hospital. We'll catch an auto—it's easier."

He lifted Dhruv, and the two of them left.

A few minutes later, I called him. "I'm coming to pick you up. Don't go to the hospital alone."

"Okay, baba. I won't," he said playfully.

We had breakfast, tea, and waited for Nandini to arrive. Kumar came to the lobby with his laptop. I took his hand and guided him to the car.

Something clicked in my mind after hearing his story the night before.

We reached the hospital and visited various departments, finally arriving at cardiology.

"I'll show you Rohan's room," I said. "He's free now—his surgery got cancelled."

When we met Rohan, he said to me, "The electrician's looking for you. Reception called."

"I'll be back," I said and left to check.

Fifteen minutes later, I returned. "What's next?"

Rohan said, "He claims he hasn't visited his sister yet. Take him there."

"Let's go," I said.

"One second," Kumar said. He called Loveleen and asked, "Do you want to visit my sister?"

He placed the cradle in its slot and, after hearing her reply, said, "She says we should go ahead."

"But first," he added, "we need to do some shopping."

Visiting His Sister

Kumar knocked on his sister's door. She opened it and called her son, "Look who's here—it's your mama!"

Her son, only a few months younger than Kumar's twins, came and took the bags from him.

Kumar's sister looked at me and asked, "Who's this girl with you? You always have some girl around."

"She's my girlfriend. Satisfied?" he said with a smirk.

We sat down.

"Tea?" she offered.

"Why not?" Kumar replied.

She went to the kitchen and asked from there, "What are you doing here? When did you arrive?"

"Two days ago," Kumar answered. "I'm here to install software at their hospital." He gestured toward me. "Meet Nandini. She's the Operations Manager. Her father owns the hospital. She also studied Hospital Management in the U.S."

His words felt contradictory—on one hand crediting my qualifications, on the other reducing me to the owner's daughter.

"She's Revathi, my sister," he added.

"I've been to your house before," I said.

"When?" Revathi asked.

Before I could answer, Kumar interrupted, "Where's your mother-in-law?"

"Her daughter took her back home," Revathi replied.

I got up, pointed at a group photo on the wall, and said, "That's her, right?"

Revathi stepped closer to the photo. "Yes! How did you know?"

"I've met her," I said quietly.

Kumar joked, "Thank God you didn't meet her now—otherwise, you'd have run away from me!" He laughed loudly.

Revathi raised her eyebrows. "What's the joke?"

"It's between us," Kumar replied, still chuckling.

I shot him a look. "What are you talking about?"

He replied in a low voice, “I haven’t seen her since my sister’s wedding. She never goes out alone. Where could you have met her?”

I sat there, sulking.

“Sorry, baba. You must’ve met her. She probably filled your ears about me, right? That’s why you ran away from me.”

“When did I run away from you?” I asked.

“Then where did you meet her?” he countered.

Revathi returned with tea. “What are you two fighting about—like a married couple?”

She turned to Kumar. “Where’s your wife?” A not-so-subtle reminder.

“She’s in Bombay, handling the interior decoration business. You haven’t visited our Juhu house since we moved. Last time you came was to pick up your son. Sneha was still alive then.”

Revathi’s tone softened. “What really happened to her?”

I spoke up. “It’s a long story. She had been helping us with the hotel, which was managed by Kirit. Her grandfather sent money through a known associate. That man abandoned her, took the money, and ran. Officially, it was called an accident. I think it could have been deliberate. I left it to her grandfather to pursue justice.”

“I still think Sneha was the better one,” Revathi said. “I never warmed up to Sahithi. She feels... controlling.”

Kumar stood up. “We’ll take your leave. We’ve got work at the hospital.”

“Stay for lunch,” she offered.

I intervened, “Sorry, sister. I dragged him here away from hospital work. He wasn’t keen to come.”

“Now you’re blaming me?” he said. “I’m the one who reminded your brother that I hadn’t visited my sister yet!”

Rohan’s sister laughed. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think you two were married—you fight like a couple.”

I blushed.

Kumar said, “I’ll come again. Next time, I’ll bring the kids.”

“What’s this I heard about a girl you found?” Revathi asked.

“You mean Leena?” he replied.

“Yes. Mom told me about her. She was calling Mom *Naanamma*, Sahithi *Aayi*, and you *Daddy*.”

“I still don’t understand her,” he said. “Sometimes I feel she’s from another universe. Maybe a time traveler. I think your husband would be more into that kind of theory.”

“She confused me too,” Revathi admitted.

“Okay, we’re going,” Kumar said. We left and got into the car.

The Drive Back

After a while, I asked, “What was that all about back there?”

“Nothing, just a joke. She was teasing, so I joined in.”

“But how did I recognize your sister’s mother-in-law?”

“Maybe she said something that turned you against me.”

“Are you bluffing?”

“If you’re lying, I’m lying. If you’re being honest, so am I.”

I went silent. My thoughts were spinning. *Did I really go away from Kumar because of something she said?* My mind felt foggy. I had the sense that I’d met her... but what did she say? Was it related to his past? He’d told me his past story just yesterday—and it didn’t fully match what I sensed deep inside. *Why don’t I remember?* Was it because of my accident?

When we reached the hospital, I left him at the parking lot and stormed off to my cabin.

The Confrontation

After five minutes, he came back and sat down in front of me, lighting a cigarette.

"Saying sorry like it's a favour," I muttered when he exited the car.

We both went inside. I sat at my desk and turned on the system. He sat opposite me.

"What's wrong, Nandu?" he asked.

I looked up. "What did you call me?"

"I said, 'What's wrong?'"

"No—after that."

"Nandu."

I smiled faintly. "I knew it. You called me Nandu. No one else ever has."

He looked at me, expression softening.

"You didn't believe me then. No one did. And no one believes me now," I said.

"I never said I didn't believe you," he replied. "I'm saying if I believe you, then it means I'll be heartbroken again. So why believe just to break again?"

"I don't want to break up with you."

"If you met her, you should remember what she said."

"That's the thing—I don't."

"Then where did you meet her? In a dream?"

"Maybe," I whispered.

"You told me I called you Nandu before. When was that?"

"That night the thief broke in. You came to rescue me. We watched TV, played cards, then fell asleep on the sofa. In the morning, I dropped you at your sister's house. That's how I know where she lives. Later, when you wrote that you were coming to Hyderabad, I went to meet you—but you weren't there. Your sister wasn't either. That's when I met her mother-in-law."

"And you don't remember what she said?"

"No. Nothing."

"Thank God," he said.

"Why are you saying that?"

"If you promise never to believe anything she says—past or future—then I can be your friend."

"I promise," I said. "Now, are you satisfied?"

He smiled. "You know what I'm thinking?"

"What?"

"How to marry you."

I stared at him. "You're already married—twice."

"That's the only problem," he said. "Shall we kill my wife?"

"Don't say such things!"

"I'm joking! Why would I kill the woman I loved and married?"

"You loved both?"

"I'm thinking of a third love marriage."

I laughed. "Oh, what a joke."

"Do you know we've launched a *Pan India Matrimonial Service*?"

"What's that?"

"It's our new software. If you register here, your profile is visible across India."

"How?"

"Joint venture with a courier company. Nationwide presence."

"You never told me."

"It's new. We just registered the company—*Pan India Matrimonial Services Pvt. Ltd.* Give me your profile. I'll register you free."

"You're charging people?"

"Of course. But for you, it's free."

"And then what?"

"Some guy will see your profile and think—'Who is this beautiful, intelligent woman?'"

"And?"

"He'll come to meet you."

"And I might marry him."

"Then you'll regret it for life."

"Why would I regret it?"

"We'll see. Give me your details."

"I'll ask my father to find a match."

"I'll call him myself."

"No—you won't. I'll do it first!"

I snatched the phone and called Dad. "Dad, I'm ready to get married. What about that Vizag match?"

He sounded pleased. "I'll check with them."

I hung up and looked at Kumar, victorious.

"You win," he said, faking a sad face.

But why did I feel like he won?

He got up. "I'll have a smoke," and stepped outside.

The Aftermath

Kumar returned with Rohan.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"What did I do?" he replied innocently.

"You made a fool out of me."

Rohan looked puzzled. "What did he do?"

I hesitated, but the frustration burst out. "He made me call Dad and say I'm ready to get married."

Rohan smiled. "That's a good thing."

"It's not that. He tricked me!"

Kumar protested, "Did I force you? Did I hold a gun to your head?"

"No—you held a gun to my heart."

He laughed. "Where's the gun now?"

"You're confusing me!" I said, flustered.

"Then calmly explain to him."

I turned to Rohan. "He said he wants to marry a third time."

"I didn't say I want to marry *you*," Kumar interjected. "I said I want a *third love marriage*."

"You did say you want to marry me!"

"No—I said I'm thinking about how to marry you."

"Then you said you wanted to kill your wife!"

"And I said *I wouldn't*. Why would I kill someone I loved and married?"

Back and forth it went—*You said, I said*.

Frustrated, I finally stormed out of the room.

Chapter 6

1st April 1994

Kumar completed clearing the old data and loaded fresh data along with the application. The hospital staff began running the system, and the initial results were satisfactory. Kumar personally visited various departments to ensure everything was functioning smoothly.

Later, he and Loveleen visited the plot of land near my house and decided to purchase it, paying an advance. They also finalized the purchase of a flat in Rohan's building—taking over the entire ground floor for their office space, and an additional flat on the same floor as Rohan's for residential use. This effectively made them his neighbors.

They called the supervisor from Loveleen's Bombay office to oversee the interior work and hired local workers for execution. The office and flat were expected to be ready in three months.

In the meantime, I arranged a room in our hospital building for them to run their Hyderabad branch. One of their developers was relocated to manage the hospital software and any necessary modifications. With the local setup progressing smoothly, they booked their return tickets to Bombay.



Rohan's Party

Rohan wanted to host a farewell party at his flat, but Kumar suggested holding it at the hotel instead so as not to disturb Dhruv's schedule. We brought two bottles of whiskey and settled into the evening.

This time, we turned the spotlight on Loveleen, urging her to share her story. Initially hesitant, she brushed it off, saying, "What story would I have?" But after some gentle persuasion, she opened up.

She shared that she was born and raised in Delhi in a politically connected family. After graduating from Delhi University, she trained at an interior design firm. Her marriage to Guru was arranged by her family to strengthen both business and political ties.

Guru expanded his business and moved to Bombay, and Loveleen followed. With his financial backing and her design experience, she started her own interior design firm in Bombay, which flourished. Eventually, she moved her operations to Andheri.

Three years into their marriage, she hadn't conceived, so her mother insisted she see a gynecologist due to growing pressure from Guru's family. The tests showed Loveleen had no issues and suggested Guru be evaluated. After initial resistance, he relented, and tests revealed he was infertile—diagnosed with low sperm motility and impotence.

Following that revelation, his behavior changed drastically. Desperate for a child, he resorted to disturbing and manipulative methods that a medical professional like Rohan could understand. He even tried involving friends to "help" her conceive. Disturbed by this emotional and psychological abuse, Loveleen reached out to her family. After confrontation, Guru's family called him back to Delhi, but Loveleen, now managing a successful business in Bombay, refused to relocate.

At this point, Kumar took over to finish telling her story.

Rohan posed the obvious question: "If Guru was impotent, how is Dhruv his son?"

Loveleen looked away, smiling faintly. "I gave Kumar drugs and obtained his sperm without his knowledge."

Kumar looked stunned. "Dhruv is my son?" He immediately stood and went to hold Dhruv tightly in his arms.

He looked at me, and I couldn't hide the accusing glance I shot him. He shook his head, clearly unaware of the truth until that moment.

We wrapped up the party, called a cab, and returned to our flat.



The Next Day

I called Kumar.

"How are you doing, Nandu?" he asked.

"I'm fine. I called to remind you we have an appointment with Mr. Naidu tomorrow. Can you come over today?"

"I'll try to catch the 9 PM flight," he replied.

Later, he called back to confirm he'd boarded the flight. I met him at the airport.

"Why did you come? I would've gone to the hotel," he said.

"I came to take you to Rohan's flat."

He placed his bag in the back seat and sat beside me.

"What's the news?" he asked.

"Everything's running smoothly," I replied.

When we reached the flat, I unlocked the door.

"Where's Rohan?" he asked.

"He had emergency surgery. He'll be back in an hour or two."

He sat on the sofa and put his bag aside.

I brought out a bottle of whiskey and a glass. "Aren't you drinking?" he asked.

"I have to head back home when Rohan returns."

I poured him a drink and handed it over. He sipped, smoked a cigarette, finished his drink, and eventually slumped over, asleep on the sofa. I stood watching him, realizing I couldn't follow through with what I had planned. I let him sleep and went into the bedroom.



The Morning After

At 6 AM, I woke up and made coffee. He rose around 7. I handed him a cup.

"Aren't you having any?" he asked.

"I already did."

"Weren't you supposed to go home? Why didn't you?"

"Rohan's surgery took longer. I stayed."

He looked confused. "Why am I sleeping on the sofa?"

"You dozed off there—I let you rest."

I prepared breakfast while he showered. We ate together.

"What time is our meeting with Mr. Naidu?"

"I'll confirm and let you know."

He pulled out his laptop and began typing.

"What are you working on?" I asked.

"My autobiography."

"Can I read it?"

"You'll have to wait till it's published."

"Why not now?"

"It's encrypted. Only my lawyer has the password."

I made a call. "Mr. Naidu is still in Delhi. They'll inform us once he's back."

He leaned back, watching me.

"What now?" he asked.

"You can continue writing. I'll sit with you."

He patted the sofa beside him. I sat down.

He asked, "What do you want?"

I hesitated.

"You called me early—I think the meeting is actually tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"So what do you want?"

I admitted, "Rohan went to a conference in Calcutta. I want... what you gave me back then."

"What did I give you?"

"In 1987."

"How old were you?"

"Twenty."

"So... what did I give you? A kiss? A hug?"

"Something more valuable."

"Don't say it was sex?"

"Yes," I said, softly.

He stared, visibly disturbed. After five minutes, I reached over and turned his face toward me.

"What are you thinking?"

He looked tormented. "Don't you understand? That wasn't me."

His tone shocked me—I trembled. He looked like a different person.

Then, suddenly, he softened. "I'm sorry," he said, pulling me into a hug. He kissed my cheeks.

I clung to him. He gently loosened my grip.

"Were you scared?"

"You looked like the devil," I said, honestly.

"I don't know what came over me."

He kissed me again, this time on the lips. I kissed him back. One kiss turned into many.

He tried to push me away, but I couldn't let go. I needed that closeness.

It was as if time rewound itself to 1987. When it was over, he sat down, dazed. I saw him as he was then. Had I really gone back in time?

I snapped him out of his daze. "Where were you?"

"I don't know. I just... remembered 1987."

I smiled. "See? You remembered."

"I wouldn't have believed myself."

"Let's visit your sister," he said.

"Now?"

"I need to confirm something."



At Revathi's House

He rang the bell. Revathi opened the door.

He handed her son ₹10 and told him to buy chocolates.

Revathi said, "Twice in a month?"

"When did I last visit?"

"Last month."

"And before that?"

“Never.”

“So how do I know your house?”

She shrugged. “Must’ve gotten the address from Dad.”

“I’ve never been here before. But I told Nandini we needed to visit you—and she guided me here.”

I added, “I remember now. Your mother-in-law told me you came to Hyderabad to write your final year exams.”

“That’s true,” Kumar confirmed. “I did my degree here, living with my grandfather.”

He turned to Revathi, “We’ve bought land near Nandini’s house, a flat for the office, and a residential one. I’ll invite you for the inauguration.”

“I’ll come,” she smiled.



Back at the Hospital

Kumar checked in with the developer, who reported no issues. “If you’re free, why not visit other hospitals?” the developer suggested.

Kumar agreed. “I’ll follow your instructions.”

We returned to my cabin.

“Do you remember what her mother-in-law said after your visit?” he asked.

“Not yet. Maybe later.”

We talked until I finished work.

“Let’s go home,” he said.

“To your house?” he asked.

“No, Rohan’s flat.”

“Don’t your parents call?”

“They know where I stay.”

“You two are close,” he observed.

“That’s why I took this profession.”

“What did I want to be?” he pondered. “I just went with the flow.”

“But look at you now—successful.”

“It’s not all my money. Some of it is the company’s, some Loveleen’s.”

“Did she really do it?”

“Drug me? I didn’t think she would. If she had asked, I might have said yes. But I dreamt she looked at me with disgust—and that haunted me.”

“What if she really hates you?”

“I keep my distance from people who hate me. That’s why I have few friends.”

“But you check on me.”

“You’ve always been special.”



The Night

At the flat, he took a shower. I brought pakoras and a whiskey bottle.

“Don’t worry—it’s not the same as yesterday’s,” I teased.

“I even thought about doing what Loveleen did, but there’s no fun in that.”

We shared a drink. After two pegs, he began writing again.

“Let’s go for dinner,” I suggested. It was past 9 PM.

We walked to a nearby restaurant.

"Have we been here before?" he asked.

"In 1987," I confirmed. "We came by car."

"Afterward?"

"We stayed in."

He smiled, "A sleepless night?"

I blushed, "Something like that."

Back at the flat, I watched him write.

"You wrote about me inspiring your software journey?"

"Yes. It started with that piece of paper you handed me—Kathuria picked it up. That's how it all began."

"You were a biologist?" I joked.

"Software bugs, not insects."

He showed me his code.

"That's enough writing," I said, closing the laptop. "Time for distraction."

He kissed me. I kissed him back—passionately.

We went to bed.

The next morning, he woke me with a kiss at 7 AM and headed to the bathroom.

It was after 11 AM when we arrived at the party office. An attendant directed us to wait for Mr. Naidu. We stood at the door, peering inside. The room had sofas arranged in an L-shape, and on one of them sat a woman—her profile just visible.

Kumar froze at the door, taking a step back.

I whispered, "What happened?"

He pulled me aside and gestured towards the woman. "That's Dolly—a gangster from Bombay. She's wanted for cheating banks and high-profile individuals."

Surprised, I asked, "How do you know her?"

"She was the one I told you about—when I had to save Kirit from some gangsters. That was her."

"What should we do?"

"Engage her in conversation. I'll find security or police," he said and dashed off.

When Kumar returned with police officers, Dolly tried to escape but was quickly caught and taken to the police station. As we left, the Sub-Inspector asked us to accompany them. Mr. Naidu's PA, watching from a distance, looked puzzled.

We approached him, and he asked, "What's going on?"

Kumar replied, "She's a notorious gangster from Maharashtra, wanted by the police in Bombay and Nashik."

"How do you know that?"

"We've been tracking her for six years. She slipped away last time. Could you help reschedule our meeting with Mr. Naidu?"

The PA nodded. "I'll see what I can do. Go with the police for now."

At the police station, a case was filed against Dolly, and her status was confirmed with Nashik police. I provided a written statement, my card, and the hospital's address in Hyderabad for any follow-up.

An hour later, we returned to the party office. Mr. Naidu's PA met us again.

"Come in—Mr. Naidu is waiting. He's postponed his other meetings."

Inside, Mr. Naidu welcomed us. Kumar explained his role in past elections and offered a data-based prediction system.

"If you provide data from the last elections, we can generate insights and suggest strategies."

Mr. Naidu nodded. "We're considering a seat-sharing arrangement with the BJP."

Kumar replied, "With historical voting data, we can simulate different scenarios and recommend the best course."

"What data do you need?"

"Voting results by constituency—votes per candidate."

"I'll arrange it. Where should I send it?"

I handed him my card. "Send it to me. I'll pass it on."

Mr. Naidu looked at the card. "So, you're the hospital administrator."

Kumar added, "And I'm here installing their hospital software."

Mr. Naidu said, "If this works out, we'll consider using your software in our government hospitals."

As we left, I smiled. "Catching Dolly helped us land this meeting."

Kumar chuckled. "Didn't we have an appointment?"

"Rahul said his PA would arrange it. So technically..."

"So we gate-crashed. Great."

"Hey, it worked—we got both our goals accomplished."

He grinned. "You're right. One shot, two targets."

"Or one target, two victories."

"Thank you."

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"No—I mean it."



Back at Rohan's Flat

We changed and settled on the sofa to watch TV. I curled up beside Kumar, my chest against his back as a romantic scene played.

He turned and kissed my cheek. I turned to face him—our lips met. We moved to the bedroom, and this time, everything felt different. I was entirely present. Not like the previous two times, where I felt like I was reliving 1987.

I lay beside him, my hand resting on his torso, my body brushing against his.

Playfully, I touched his groin. "What are you thinking?"

He responded, voice low and aroused, "Only about you."

"What's on your mind?"

"How marvellous our lovemaking is."

"Do you really think so?"

"Let's test it again."



Evening Out

By 7 PM, he asked, "Shall we go out or cook?"

"I don't think we have anything to cook."

"Let's go out then."

"I'll get ready."

"What are the happening places nearby?"

"I heard a new jazz bar opened. Shall I confirm?"

"Please do."

I called a friend—it was nearby. "Confirmed."

"What are we waiting for?" he grinned.

I changed into a short, modern outfit—my skirt above the knee.

"Let's go."

We took Rohan's car and headed to the jazz bar. The live music was electrifying. We enjoyed drinks and snacks, soaking in the ambiance. After the concert, we went to a restaurant for dinner.

The Night After

Back at the flat, Kumar sat on the sofa and pulled me onto his lap.

"You look sexy."

"Really?" I asked.

"You're incredibly sexy," he murmured, kissing me.

We lost ourselves in a passionate embrace—our last intimate moment that night.

Later, I changed into my nightwear and joined him in bed. Kumar stared at the ceiling, lost in thought.

I rested my hand on his chest. "What are you looking at?"

"That dot."

"There's no dot."

"Exactly. I'm not looking at anything."

"You say the strangest things."

"Then why aren't you laughing?"

"It's not that kind of funny."

"Seems there are many kinds of fun."

Frustrated, I sat up. "What's gotten into you?"

"I want you to marry the match your parents found."

"Why would I take your advice?"

"It's not advice—it's a request."

"Who are you to request?"

"Ask your heart."

I touched my chest. "It says... you're my well-wisher."

He nodded. "That's why I'm saying this."

"I'll wait before accepting their match."

"What will you do in the meantime?"

"I want to be with you."

"You're here. I'm in Bombay."

"I'll come with you."

"Sahithi will bury me in the backyard if she finds out."

"She won't."

"You know about Sunitha?"

"You make love to her in her office. Joy told me."

"Sometimes we discuss work... Joy misunderstood."

"Do I look like someone who believes rumours?"

"She wanted you to. You didn't fall for it."

"She's trying to spread lies?"

"If ten people lie, it becomes the truth."

"You're right." I lay beside him, tracing circles on his chest. "Can you give me a child?"

"What?"

"I want a kid."

"Your husband can give you children."

"I want one from you."

"What will people say?"

"You gave Loveleen a child."

"She did it secretly. I didn't know until she told you."

"Really? You didn't know?"

"When her father announced her pregnancy, I got suspicious. She was in Bombay then, and her husband was beside her."

"Then I'll get a husband. You'll give me a child?"

"Promise?"

"Promise."

I turned away, content, and fell asleep.

Kumar awakened me with a cup of coffee. I murmured, "Let me sleep, please." He reached for the bedsheet, intending to pull it off, but changed his mind and walked back to the hall, where he sank into the sofa.

A few minutes later, I followed him with the coffee and asked about his earlier comment. He smiled apologetically.

"I was going to pull the sheet off you, but when I saw you, I changed my mind—that's why I said sorry."

"I thought you'd crawl under the bedsheet instead of apologizing," I teased.

He chuckled. "Now I genuinely regret not doing that."

I smiled and accepted his apology, and he kissed me gratefully.

After I said I was going to take a bath, I grabbed a towel and headed to the bathroom. Kumar suggested we shower together. I undressed and joined him. Under the running water, our kiss deepened into a passionate encounter.

Afterward, I finished my shower and found Kumar on the sofa reading the newspaper. One article grabbed my attention: it reported the arrest of a notorious gangster in a police raid. The report named RK as Rakesh Khanna, the real mastermind, with Dolly—his accomplice—running the operations in public. They were now both in custody, undergoing interrogation.

Kumar immediately called Kirit to discuss the news. Although reported by the Andhra police, the story had made national headlines. He read the article aloud, telling Kirit that with both Dolly and her boss behind bars, he could finally stop fearing them. Kumar voiced his frustration that the Bombay police hadn't acted earlier, even after he had given them leads.

He recounted how he had called security after spotting Dolly at the party office, which led to her arrest. Her interrogation provided enough intel to capture Rakesh Khanna overnight. I suggested we inform Mahira, then told Kumar we should head to the hospital and have breakfast there.

Kumar showed me the article again, and I remarked that this event might work in our favour with Mr. Naidu. He nodded but hoped it wouldn't cause any complications for us. I assured him that if anything, they should be grateful—we had exposed a criminal inside their office.

Kumar believed the duo's plan was to defraud individuals and banks, and we had intercepted it just in time. He kissed me, and we headed to the hospital. There, he went to his designated room. I asked Mohan about the name of the developer assigned to Kumar; he confirmed it and soon joined us with his laptop.

As he typed, Kumar glanced at me more than his screen. I asked why, and he replied, "You're too beautiful to ignore. I regret not spending more time with you."

I reminded him that I hadn't even known him before he visited my room, and he had already been twice married, with children. At first, I had seen him only as a friend. But when he revealed his feelings, I realized he was the one I had longed to meet again.

I told him how heartbroken I was when he said he wanted nothing to do with me. But I chose to follow him to Delhi after Guru's death, hoping to win him over. Unfortunately, Loveleen's presence changed the dynamic, and I felt sidelined until our time at Rohan's flat.

Kumar said it was during a story I told—about my "guardian angel" from 1987—that he realized our connection. Until then, he hadn't remembered his role that night. I asked how he recalled it, and he admitted that our intimacy had triggered vivid memories, as if he had returned to that night. I echoed that sentiment; it had felt the same for me.

We speculated about Leena being a time traveller. Kumar said he wasn't disturbed this time when she disappeared, unlike before. I asked him what our future held, and he replied, "Only time will tell."

Mohan informed him that the data upload was complete, and Kumar asked him to transfer it to the server. Once done, Kumar decided to take a break and asked me to return by 4 PM. I agreed.

After breakfast, I returned to my room, where Kumar was waiting. I apologized for the delay—the canteen had forgotten my order. We ate together, and I arranged tea. He reminded me again of our 4 PM meeting.

Kumar promised he'd return to Hyderabad regularly. Just then, Mohan came rushing in with a call from Pauleen, warning us to expect a call from the Paints Company. Kumar joined me in my room, and we discussed the urgency. Shortly after, the call came. The Paints Company reported software issues at their Madras office. Kumar saw this as an opportunity to establish a regional presence. I offered to accompany him, suggesting we make a trip out of it.

We booked tickets for the next morning, had lunch, and visited Mr. Naidu's office. There, we were warmly received.

Mr. Naidu asked how we were linked to Dolly. Kumar explained that a friend had been lured into a trap involving a factory and a bank loan—Dolly was at the centre of it all. Mr. Naidu was surprised to learn the true identity of Dolly's boss.

Kumar presented election strategy reports and explained the software that generated them. Mr. Naidu was impressed and expressed interest in future collaboration.

Kumar made it clear: he wasn't looking for political favours—only opportunities to create value through business.

Back at the hospital, Kumar met with Mohan again before settling in to work. I joined him, and he asked me to arrange his return ticket to Bombay. I suggested staying one more night, but he preferred returning to his flat.

That evening, we discussed the potential groom my family had found. Kumar helped me evaluate the match. We arranged a meeting, and the next day, met Prathap, who seemed genuinely interested. After a productive conversation, we agreed to connect our families formally.

Later, Kumar called my parents to share the update. They were delighted by the potential alliance.

As our time together ended, we spent a quiet final evening cherishing each moment. The next morning, I drove him to the airport. As he boarded his flight back to Bombay, I stood there, my heart filled with gratitude, sorrow, and a faint hope for what the future might bring.

Chapter 7

In the years that followed, I had minimal contact with Kumar. He was preoccupied with expanding his business, setting up new branches, and even dabbling in politics. Meanwhile, my parents arranged my marriage to Prathap, though the engagement kept getting postponed for various reasons.

During this time, Kumar requested that I speak to my father about assisting the Sena with the construction of a hospital in Bombay. My father agreed to provide logistical support, and I found myself with little spare time at the hospital.

In 1997, when we travelled to Bombay for the hospital's inauguration, Kumar arranged for my wedding date to be fixed—21st March. Eventually, I became Mrs. Prathap. I thought, *If Kumar is no longer part of my life, I must accept what life brings*. Ironically, this marriage was orchestrated by Kumar himself. He even ensured the rituals were performed in Bombay.

At first, Prathap was caring and affectionate. But over time, he became increasingly paranoid. He questioned Kumar's every action. *Why did Kumar arrange the wedding in Bombay? What was his interest in it?* I explained that it was Kumar's way of returning the favour for my father's help in building the Sena hospital. Prathap didn't see it that way. *It wasn't even his own hospital*, he would argue. *Why would he go out of his way like that?*

I tried to make him understand that Kumar's actions were strategic—part of a political campaign to win public trust. But Prathap couldn't see past Kumar's success, influence, and political clout. He believed Kumar had an ulterior motive—me. But the truth was, if anyone had feelings for someone else, it was me. Kumar had been my dream man, my guiding light. Prathap was merely the reality I settled for.

Later, when a building near our home came up for sale—owned by a doctor—I informed Kumar. He visited, liked it, and gave an advance. That's how we ended up as neighbours.

In July 1999, I heard Kumar was coming to Hyderabad. I checked whether he was at his flat. He had arrived with Loveleen but sent her to Madras for an interior design project. I called from the hospital.

"I'm here," he said. "But the servant left. If you're expecting food, you better bring it from outside."

"Nothing like that," I replied. "I need to speak with you urgently."

"Then come over—I'm free."

I arrived half an hour later, carrying a bottle. He brought two glasses while I unpacked some snacks.

"What's the problem?" he asked.

"I have doubts about my husband."

"Why?"

"He hasn't given me a child yet."

"You work in a hospital. Have you gotten yourself checked?"

"I have. Prathap, however, refuses to get tested."

"Then find a way to get him checked."

"Ever since I asked, he's been behaving oddly. I suspect he got tested on his own—and that the results weren't good. He's paranoid I might try to test his semen without his knowledge."

Kumar asked, "What do you want from me?"

"I want you to fulfill your promise."

He looked confused. "What promise?"

"Did you forget? You promised to give me a child."

"Oh, that promise," he said, finally recalling.

"How can I do that now?" he asked. "You're married. If Prathap has already tested himself and you suddenly become pregnant, wouldn't he suspect you?"

"He already suspects. Ever since we visited his office, he's been different."

"Are you facing any issues in your marriage?"

"Not exactly. But there's this lingering doubt between us."

"There's a Telugu saying," Kumar said. "If you ask who stole the pumpkin, the thief touches his shoulder to check if it's still there.' Maybe because we've had a relationship, you're reading into things."

"No, I came here with a purpose. You made me a promise. You must keep it."

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's go to the bedroom."

Kumar stayed in Hyderabad for a week, and every day, I visited his flat.

The New Year Tragedy

It was the beginning of a new year when Sunitha called with heartbreaking news: **Kumar was no more.**

I broke down. But I found comfort in knowing that his child was growing inside me. I immediately booked a flight and travelled to Bombay for the funeral. The rituals were performed according to tradition. I returned to Hyderabad with a void in my heart, burying myself in work to cope.

They invited me for the puja in Bombay, but I couldn't bear to go. Attending would only confirm what I didn't want to accept: that Kumar was gone.

Will he be born to me again?

If I give birth to a son, will it be Kumar?

A Miracle Unfolds

The next day, a miracle happened.

I was in my cabin, working on my computer when an attender rushed in, breathless.

"Madam, Kumar sir is on a stretcher outside."

"What?" I asked, stunned. "Who brought him?"

"I don't know. He was unconscious. We brought him to the emergency room."

I ran—pregnant and panicked—to the ER.

By the time I arrived, Kumar had regained consciousness.

"Madam, he's awake!" the nurse exclaimed.

I went to him. "Kumar, are you okay?"

"Where am I?" he asked, confused.

"You're in our hospital."

"Where is this hospital?"

His questions shocked me. Did he not recognize me?

"Doctor," I called out, "he seems to have forgotten everything."

The doctor examined him. "There are no external injuries. This is Hyderabad."

Kumar nodded. "Okay... Hyderabad... but how did I get here?"

"Someone left you outside the hospital. A ward boy recognized you and brought you in."

He looked at me and asked, "Who is the pregnant lady?"

The doctor said, "That's Nandini. She's the hospital administrator."

I went to my office and made calls to Bombay. When I returned, I said, "Sahithi, Sunitha, and Loveleen are on their way—they're catching the next available flight."

I looked at him and remarked, "You look younger. How old are you?"

"I just turned 22 this April."

I gasped. "You're so young."

"What year is it?"

"It's February 2000."

"Nandini, do I know you?"

"Know me? We've been friends for six years. You fixed my marriage—don't you remember?"

"I fixed your marriage?"

He looked at me with growing confusion. "And who are these people—Sunitha, Sahithi, and that other woman?"

"Sahithi is your wife. Sunitha is your operations director and... your girlfriend. Loveleen is your business partner."

He asked, "Do I have children?"

"Yes—Atul and Reena."

"Where's Leena?"

"She went back to her mother, remember?"

"Do I wear a dhoti?" he asked suddenly.

I blinked. "Why would you wear a dhoti? You wear suits."

"Doctor, can I stand up?"

"Try."

He sat on the edge of the bed, got his bearings, and slowly stood. A bit unsteady at first, but he soon regained his balance.

The doctor pulled me aside. "He seems to have amnesia. But he looks 15 years younger than when I last saw him. This is strange."

Rahul rushed in. "Nandini, someone said Kumar has returned."

"Yes, but he looks just like he did in 1987."

Rahul examined him. "This is some kind of magic."

He turned to me. "Take him to his flat. When Sahithi and the others arrive from Bombay, I'll send them there."

I asked Kumar, "Can you walk? Or should we go by car?"

"How far is the flat?"

"Better take the car."

Outside, we found an ambulance waiting. We rode for a minute, reached the building, and took the lift to the top floor. I knocked, and the servant opened the door. I guided Kumar inside and sat him on the sofa.

"Get him a cup of tea," I told the servant. "It may revive him."

He looked around. "Who did the interiors?"

"Loveleen. She personally decorated this flat. Try to rest—I'll come back when the others arrive."

He asked softly, "Where should I rest?"

"Oh," I said, catching myself. "Come, I'll show you."

I led him to the bedroom. He lay on the bed.

I kissed his forehead. "Take some rest. I'll return soon."

He closed his eyes, and I quietly stepped out of the room.

A few days later, Kumar—accompanied by Sunitha—walked into my cabin.

I stood from my chair, looked him over in disbelief, and hugged him.

"I still can't understand how you could come back," I said.

He must have thought it wouldn't hurt to tell me the truth. He said:

"I was sent from my timeline to set things right in the businesses here—or perhaps to discover the cause of my death. The official reason given was to fix the businesses, which I've done by appointing Loveleen as the head. She now oversees all operations and intervenes if there are conflicts between branches.

The one thing I still don't understand is how I met you in 1987. Because the Kumar from my timeline has no memory of it. Was it someone else who met you? Or do you have memories from another timeline? I hadn't reached that year in my timeline yet—so none of it makes sense. Maybe I'll meet you again... in the future."

"Did you really come from the past?" I asked.

"I'd say I was brought to your present from my 1986. It's confusing, but I'm slowly understanding how this works. From what I gather, there are four versions of Kumar, including me. I've only met Sneha, Sahithi, and Sunitha. In this timeline, Sneha is gone. In mine, she might be at her grandparents' house—or maybe even married off. And then there's the Kumar from Leena's story—who must belong to a completely different timeline, since Leena didn't recognize Sneha from the photos.

I believe Sneha was part of our intermediate college life in some timeline, which leads me to conclude that each timeline was crafted to shape our lives differently. Beyond that, I couldn't find much about the other Kumars. But there were definitely manipulations involving people—like Leena and my Sahithi."

"Come," I said, "let's go have lunch."

We went to a nearby restaurant and returned to the hospital afterward.

Kumar lightly touched my stomach.

"How far along are you?"

"Thirty-six weeks. Just a month to go."

The baby shifted. It must've felt something—some bond.

Kumar looked at me. "Is it...?"

I nodded.

He asked, "How?"

"You promised to give me a child. I made sure you fulfilled that promise."

"Boy or girl?"

"A boy."

He smiled. "Let's head to the offices and check on the work."

"I'll see you in the evening," I said. "Maybe we can have a sit-in."

"You can't drink."

"I'll still sit with you. Prathap is out of town, and Rohan also wants to talk to you about your... timeline."

"Alright. If not at the office, we'll be at the flat," he said, and walked out.

Evening at the Flat

That evening, I went to their flat. Kumar told me he had appointed Sunitha as Operations Head.

"What brought on the sudden change?" I asked.

"These companies lacked proper management. No one was accountable. I needed someone who could put pressure on the managers, who would, in turn, put pressure on their teams. That's the only way these businesses will function efficiently."

"And Loveleen?"

"She's now Head of Business. She'll oversee all company heads and handle inter-business issues. Sunitha will monitor day-to-day operations and performance."

Sunitha added, "But this wasn't how Kumar had structured things."

"That's why I had to come—to set things right. His setup wasn't entirely wrong, but it had gaps. I'm reorganizing to clear bottlenecks. I also plan to promote Sahithi as Managing Director of Loveleen's firm. Loveleen oversees everything now, so someone has to manage her business specifically."

I called Pauleen to propose Sahithi's promotion at the next board meeting.

Sunitha asked, "Don't you think you're moving too fast?"

"I think I'm moving too slow. Until I complete my mission here, I can't return to my timeline."

"What's so urgent about going back?"

"I need to shape my future. With this experience, I plan to launch my own business."

"You may lack the experience of the other Kumar. He learned through trial and error. You're only hitting the targets—never missing. But business isn't just about victories. Expect resistance."

The Confrontation

Later, I returned from an errand to find Kumar and Sunitha waiting in my cabin.

"How long were you waiting?" I asked.

"About 15 minutes," Kumar replied. "Your husband was here 10 minutes ago. Didn't he call you?"

"Prathap was here? No, he didn't call."

Sunitha asked, "Do you know where he might be?"

"Probably visiting a relative in the hospital—maybe in ward P02."

Sunitha left to investigate. I asked Kumar what was going on.

"Let's wait for Sunitha," he said, changing the subject. We chatted about the hospital and my father's projects.

An hour later, Sunitha returned.

"Kumar, come with me."

They both left. After 6 PM, I visited again.

"What happened?" I asked. "You disappeared without a word."

Kumar looked at Sunitha.

Sunitha hesitated.

Then Kumar said, "Sunitha suspects Prathap believed the baby was mine—and had me killed."

Sunitha added, "I still can't understand how he could mistrust his own wife."

We sat in silence for a while.

Kumar finally asked, "Tea?"

"Yes, please."

Kumar made tea and brought three cups. We sipped quietly.

Then I opened up.

"Prathap told me he'd be away for a week, and I asked Kumar to fulfill his promise to give me a child. At first, he hesitated, but I convinced him. I suspected Prathap was impotent after two years of trying for a child. When I got pregnant, he must've figured out the timeline. He likely deduced it wasn't his child—and assumed Kumar was blackmailing me for sex."

Sunitha said, "So... who helped him?"

I paused. "You'll be shocked. It was Sahithi."

"What?" Sunitha gasped. "Why would she?"

"He must've told her what he told me—that Kumar used coercion. Maybe he also told her about his relationships—with you and Loveleen."

Sunitha asked, "How did she help him?"

"She gave him a blood-thickening agent. Both knew Kumar's smoking habits. They anticipated a cardiac event and used it to their advantage. Sahithi likely administered it while he was recovering in the hospital. After that, he was declared dead from a heart attack."

Sunitha whispered, "Maybe she thought... if she couldn't have him, no one else could. She probably realized this Kumar wasn't the same man she knew."

Kumar said, "That would explain her behavior. She was testing me. If I had known her motives, I'd have reacted differently. But I didn't. So I acted like her husband—and she didn't catch the lie."

He looked at me. "We'll talk later." And ended the call.

The Aftermath

And that was how the truth about Kumar's death came out.

That night, I went home and told my father:

"I can't live with Prathap. He got Kumar killed."

"Do you have proof?"

“He confessed.”

“But that’s not enough. And now that Kumar’s returned, what action can we take?”

“I still can’t stay with him. Please get me a divorce.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”



New Life

Three months later, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

I named him **Vivek Rao Kumar**.

EPILOGUE

It was January 2020 when I was asked to join Kumar. A man named Mr. Bob escorted us to the Moon base.

To be continued...