



Nandini - An Autobiography

Story of Nandini from Innocent Man

Anne Reporter

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Chapter 1

I had always been a rebel, even from a young age. As the only child of my parents, I was given complete freedom.

By the time I reached high school, I had become an arrogant, selfish brat.

Eventually, I was expelled in the eighth grade for getting into a fight with other students. With no better school options available, my father enrolled me in a boarding school in Dehradun. What he didn't realize was that I could have gotten into even more trouble there.

However, the school turned out to be extremely strict. I suspect my father had warned them about me beforehand—there was no room to misbehave.

Under this discipline, I managed to complete my 10th grade.

Seeing my academic improvement, my father decided to keep me there for college as well. Though it was officially called a college, in reality, it felt more like an extension of school. We still had to follow all the same rituals—uniforms, rules, and routines.

Then everything changed. My world turned upside down the day I saw Kumar with one of my seniors.

I felt an inexplicable connection to him, as if I had known him across lifetimes.

But when I discovered he had come as their servant, I was deeply disappointed.

Later when I came to know he was not her servant but her lover. From someone I came to know he was not her lover, he came to sell sex. Yes, that's correct, I found that he was a gigolo. This is the first time for me to find one in India.

I don't know to laugh or cry about that.

But when girls started a rumour that if we have a first night with him, we will have lifelong satisfaction in sex.

They told me he would return the next summer, and that Nimisha would arrange a week-long experience with him for girls who could afford it. So, I began saving money for his return. If I couldn't have him to myself, even a week with him would be heavenly.

But he didn't come with Nimisha the following year. Frustrated, I ended up wasting all the money I had saved on useless things.

Then, two weeks later, he finally arrived. This time, Nimisha decided to organize an auction for a week with him. She announced there would be four rounds of bidding, each for one week.

I took part in the auction, but I didn't have enough money to place a serious bid. I asked my father for help, but the money came too little, too late. I told myself, *maybe next year*.

That year, I lived in anticipation, listening to stories from girls who had spent time with him. Even if it wasn't about lifelong satisfaction, they said the experience would stay with them forever.

But the following year brought a devastating surprise. Nimisha returned—with a boy who wasn't Kumar. No one was interested in spending time with the new boy. He worked quietly as a servant, and they left soon after.

After I completed school, I returned to Guntur and later traveled to Vijayawada in search of Kumar. I knew the only person who might know his whereabouts was Nimisha. So, I contacted one of my classmates who had spent time with him and had gotten pregnant. Her mother had pulled her out of school, but she gave me the address of Nimisha's bungalow—well known in Vijayawada.

There, I faced another disappointment. Nimisha had sold her business and house and moved to Bombay. She didn't know Kumar's address—he hadn't given it to anyone, afraid people might follow him there. The only person who might know was his ex, Sunitha.

But Nimisha warned me not to bother with Sunitha. She had learned about Kumar's activities in Dehradun through a neighbor—who happened to be the mother of the girl he had impregnated.

I still went to see that girl, but she told me Sunitha had already left for Bombay too, and she had no idea where Sunitha was staying.

At that point, I told myself: *If he's meant for me, he'll find his way back to me.*

When some of the girls began preparing to go to the USA for further studies, I applied too and got into a hospital administration program. My cousin was studying to become a doctor, and I wanted to manage the hospital my father planned to build with his brother.

Chapter 2

After completing my Hospital Administration course in the USA, I returned to Hyderabad. My father is currently building a hospital here, and it's almost finished—just the final touches are being added.

During my time in New York, I kept my distance from men. I believed that if I focused on Kumar, he would eventually reappear in my life. I had made up my mind to lose my virginity only to him. When I set my mind on something, I don't waver.

While the hospital was nearing completion, my parents had to travel to Guntur to attend a close relative's wedding. Around the same time, Krishna Uncle's daughter was getting married in Hyderabad. My father asked me to help with arrangements since the family was coming from Bombay for the wedding. Krishna Uncle, a long-time friend of my father's, often visited our home whenever he was in Hyderabad. Though I'd never met him because I was in the USA, I'd heard nothing but praise—Dad always described him as a selfless man who went out of his way to help others.

He had supported one of Dad's cousins who faced corruption charges in the Telecom Department and even helped a business partner recover delayed payments. When I went to meet

him at his hotel, he welcomed me warmly and introduced me to his wife and daughter. His elder son couldn't attend the wedding, and the younger son was out on an errand.

Krishna Uncle said he was funding the entire wedding himself, including the clothing and jewelry. He had reportedly sold some software and earned ₹50 lakhs—a huge sum in those days. That meant he must have been a talented programmer. Having heard a lot about software during my time in the U.S., I wanted to incorporate it into our hospital's operations. If successful, ours would be the first hospital in India to run fully on custom software, bringing prestige and recognition.

When his younger son returned to the hotel room, I was stunned beyond belief—it was Kumar. I couldn't trust my eyes.

We started talking casually. He seemed subdued, and his mother later told me his girlfriend, an air hostess, had died in a plane crash just the previous week. That meant he was single now—and perhaps ready for my long-awaited plan.

I asked him if he could develop software for our hospital. He said he had full expertise in software development. I invited him to visit the hospital so I could show him around.

I gave him a brief tour and then brought him into my cabin, pretending to search for some

documents. I even checked my father's cabin, saying I had prepared a document detailing the software requirements but must have left it at home.

We drove to our house in Jubilee Hills. I stopped outside the gate, opened it, then parked the car inside. After entering, I locked the door behind us—I didn't want anyone interrupting.

He asked, "Is there no one at home?"

I replied, "Mom and Dad went to Guntur for a wedding. They'll be back before your sister's ceremony."

I went to my room and returned, telling him I couldn't find the documents—they might be with Dad. Then I asked, "Would you like something to drink?"

He said, "Anything's fine."

I brought a bottle of whiskey and asked, "How about this?"

He seemed to catch on to my intentions and replied, "Okay by me."

I fetched two glasses, poured us each a drink, and brought some snacks from the kitchen. Kumar sipped his drink and looked at me. I took a moment to study him. He was about 5'5", not skinny, clearly someone who worked out regularly—his physique would make many

envious. There was something deep in his eyes—sadness, perhaps, or wisdom. I couldn't quite tell.

I noticed him looking me over and asked, "What are you looking at?"

He said, "I've never seen anyone like you."

I teased, "How many have you seen?"

He smiled, "You're one in a million."

"Am I?" I asked. "Then what are you waiting for?"

He understood. He came toward me. I stood up and looked into his eyes. He looked into mine. Whatever he saw there made him lean in and kiss me—hard.

It felt like the end of a long wait. There was magic in his kiss, and in the way he held me. We kissed for what felt like forever. Then I took his hand and led him to my room.

He took me to heaven with his lovemaking. His experience can be seen in the way he is making love.

After we made love, I took out a pack of cigarettes and offered him one. He lit it, took a drag, and exhaled slowly. I took it from him, had a puff myself, and handed it back.

"You're even better than what I heard," I said with a soft smile.

Surprise flickered across his face. He looked at me sharply and asked, "Where did you hear about me?"

"Don't you remember?" I replied. "I came to see you when you were supposed to return. I thought I'd see you the next year, but you never came back. I know everything about you—but don't worry, I won't tell a soul. Your mother told me how you turned your life around. How you tried to raise a little girl, how your wedding was canceled at the last minute, and how that girl later went missing. She also told me about your girlfriend, the air hostess who died in a plane crash, and how you're paying for your sister's entire wedding."

He nodded slightly and said, "I got ₹50 lakhs as compensation for the software I developed."

"₹50 lakhs?" I asked, amazed. "What kind of software was that?"

"It was a data transfer system between branches using telephone lines," he explained.

"They paid that much for it?" I asked, still stunned.

"They wanted to use it in the U.S., and I had already sent them a legal notice regarding ownership. They didn't want any complications,

so they paid. Honestly, I didn't expect them to offer so much."

He wasn't just intelligent—he had true ingenuity. Who else could manage something like that?

"What else can you develop?" I asked curiously.

"I've got a lot of ideas. I'm actually planning to start my own software development firm."

"But first, you'll develop our hospital software," I said with a smile.

"Of course. I'll handle yours first."

I glanced at the time. "Let's go out for dinner."

Wanting to impress him, I took him to a high-end restaurant. But he didn't seem particularly impressed. Either that, or his mind was somewhere else.

What could he be thinking, sitting across from a girl like me? Was he not moved by my presence? Would he ever love me the way I love him? I knew he had been with many women. I'd heard his last girlfriend, Sunitha, was beautiful—an air hostess. But she was no longer in this world. Was she still in his thoughts?

If he had no feelings for me, why did he make love to me? He didn't seem like the kind of man who would use someone. From everything I knew, it seemed women had left him—he hadn't betrayed them.

When we returned home, I switched on the TV and went to change. I came back and sat beside him. He looked at me, and for the first time, I felt he recognized the love in my eyes. He leaned back, relaxed. Seeing him finally at ease put my own heart at rest.

I gently held his shoulder, and we sat together watching TV. After about an hour, I turned to him and said, "Let's get some sleep."

He got up and followed me—like a puppy following its master.

He started making love to me passionately. It seems he loves me as much as I loved him all this time. He seemed to recognise my true self and my love.

I heard a noise coming from the ground floor.

Kumar got up from me. I whispered, "It's probably just a cat or something."

He shook his head slightly. "It could be a thief. I'll go check."

He got out of bed, slipped on his underwear, and walked toward the door.

A moment later, I heard it—someone was actually opening the door. Startled, I sat up.

Then, in a sudden burst of motion, a man at the door dropped a bag and bolted as soon as he saw us.

Kumar picked up the bag, glanced inside, and said, "There's not much in here."

He went downstairs to inspect the house and returned a few minutes later. "I've locked all the doors and windows," he assured me.

Then he climbed back into bed, sat beside me, and continued where we had left off—resuming our moment together as if it had never been interrupted.

Kumar gently woke me from sleep. "I should head back to the hotel. My parents must be wondering where I disappeared to."

"I'll drop you off and then go to the hospital," I said. "Don't worry, I'll cover for you."

I got ready, dropped him off outside the hotel, and then went to the hospital to check on the ongoing work. After reviewing everything, I returned to the hotel. But when I arrived, I found the entire family had gone out.

I waited for a while, and eventually, they returned from the groom's house.

Kumar's mother saw me and asked, "Have you been waiting long?"

"Just five minutes," I replied with a smile. "I came to take Kumar with me to the hospital—we have to complete some documentation."

She said warmly, "All our ceremonies are done. You can take him now. Just return him by the mahurat time."

"Of course," I said.

Once we were in the car, I told Kumar, "My parents are coming back tomorrow."

"Will they attend our wedding?" he asked.

"Certainly," I replied, smiling.

We reached home. This time, he got out first, opened the gate, let me drive in, and then closed it behind me. By the time I unlocked the front door, he had caught up. We both entered together, and he locked the door before settling onto the sofa.

I went into the kitchen and brought out lunch. After we ate, we went to my room and lost ourselves in our passionate escape once more. No matter how hard he tried to satisfy me, I kept wanting more. He gave me all he had—his experience, his affection—and finally, I felt completely fulfilled. We fell asleep in each other's arms.

Two hours later, I woke him up, handed him a cigarette, and asked, "Do you want a drink?"

"Please get me one," he said.

I brought him a peg of whiskey and handed it to him. He sipped and leaned back on the bed. I sat

beside him, kissed him, and whispered, "I love you."

He paused, thoughtful, and then said, "Before I commit to anything, I need to tell you something."

"What is it?"

"I've had a few girlfriends in the past."

"I know your history. I don't care about that."

"But I need to tell you about Leena."

"I know—you've adopted her. That's what you mean, right?"

"It's more than that. She's actually my biological daughter."

I stared at him, stunned. "How's that even possible? Was she born when you were twelve?"

"No," he said, then took a deep breath. "Let me explain everything. During my first year of college, I went on vacation to Bombay. That's where I met Sahithi. We had a one-night stand, and she got pregnant. She prayed for guidance, and—this will sound unbelievable—she was taken to another dimension. Time moved differently there. She gave birth to Leena, but when she returned, only a few hours had passed here. She came back without the baby. Leena was raised by another version of me—one who's

a pujari—and Sneha, my classmate from junior college.

A year later, when Leena was seven, she returned to me. Now, who would believe all that? So I told my parents that her biological parents were missing and that I would raise her as my own. Later, I was supposed to marry Sahithi. But my girlfriend Sunitha interfered and ruined the wedding. After that, Sahithi's parents took her abroad. Then, not long ago, Sunitha was presumed dead after a plane crash. Her body was never found.

Now you know everything. It's up to you to decide what you want."

I looked at him for a moment, trying to absorb all he had said. "I admire your honesty. I don't understand much about what happened with Leena—but I don't mind that she's your daughter. Let's go. I'll drop you at your hotel and then pick up my parents from the wedding."

Chapter 3

I got ready and headed to the railway station to pick up Mom and Dad, who were returning from Guntur.

On the way, Mom asked about Krishna Uncle's daughter's wedding preparations. I updated them on the arrangements and mentioned the time of the *muhurat* so we could attend accordingly.

I also told Dad about Krishna Uncle's son, Kumar, who would be developing our hospital's software.

Mom asked, "What's the need for software in a hospital?"

I explained how software could boost productivity and efficiency, making our hospital more attractive to patients.

We reached home, got dressed, and proceeded to the wedding hall. Dad parked the car, and I got out quickly and walked briskly toward the entrance.

Mom, a little puzzled, asked, "What's the hurry?"

I didn't answer and entered the hall, scanning the crowd. I saw Kumar sitting in the front row with his daughter, Leena.

When I looked at Leena, I couldn't help but wonder how he could possibly have a daughter that old.

Kumar noticed me and asked, "Where are your parents?"

"They're right behind me," I said.

Just then, his father spotted my parents entering the hall and went over to greet them. He brought them to where we were seated. Kumar stood up, greeted them with a polite *namaste*, and shook hands with my father. His dad then went off to assist with the wedding arrangements.

My father asked Kumar, "What do you do?"

"I'm starting a software development business," Kumar replied.

Dad raised an eyebrow. "How do you know software?"

"I taught myself and developed a software solution for a company, for which I received fifty lakhs."

"Fifty lakhs? That must have been something significant," Dad said, clearly impressed.

"With that money, I'm planning to launch my own software firm. Nandini had asked me to help with developing software for your hospital."

"Do you have experience with that kind of application?"

“I have complete knowledge of how to build it. I’ll return to Bombay and prepare a prototype for you to evaluate.”

“Good. You should coordinate directly with Nandini,” Dad said.

Kumar nodded.

I noticed my mother walking over to speak with his mother. Then the *purohit* called for the bride to come forward for the *puja*. Both mothers went to bring my sister to the stage.

Throughout the wedding ceremony, my mother stood beside his mother until the bride was finally sent off with the groom.

Afterward, both mothers sat down and began a serious discussion. Soon, they invited both fathers to join them. A short while later, they called me over as well and asked for my opinion of Kumar.

“I liked him from the moment I saw him. He’s intelligent, has a quiet charm, and earning fifty lakhs for a single software project is quite impressive.”

After talking with me, his parents called Kumar over. His father said, “Nandini’s parents have agreed to the alliance. Nandini is also aware of your cancelled wedding and has no objection. Everyone is ready to move forward.”

Kumar replied thoughtfully, "I don't have any objection to the alliance either, but I'd like to focus on my business for now."

My parents agreed. "That works for us too. We're focused on setting up the hospital at the moment. Since Kumar will be working on the software with us, we'll naturally stay in touch."

And so, the families agreed to our match in principle and decided to keep in touch. Since his sister would be living in Hyderabad, his parents would be visiting often for various occasions.

Kumar had begun developing the Hospital Management Software, and while we were regularly in touch, most of our conversations were less about the software and more about making plans for our future together.

It took him about a month to complete the software, and once ready, he called Dad to review it. Dad, in turn, asked me to go and evaluate it. I had been waiting for that opportunity. Without delay, I booked the earliest available train to Bombay.

Kumar picked me up from the station and took me straight to his flat.

As soon as we arrived, and he locked the door behind us, he pulled me into a passionate kiss—it was clear he had been waiting for this moment

for the entire month. He led me to the bedroom, and after we made love, he let me freshen up.

After lunch, he sat me down and walked me through the software. He demonstrated every screen, explained each column and its function. I was truly amazed by what he had built. He had captured every requirement I'd mentioned.

"You've covered everything," I said. "There's nothing more I can think of to add. But how did you manage to develop it so perfectly, exactly to my specifications?"

His reply surprised me. "You've been giving me instructions in my dreams. I just followed them—and started my backend coding from there."

Later, after a quick round of intimacy, he took me to his parents' home.

I greeted them and took their blessings. Kumar's mother then took me aside into the bedroom and began asking about my family. Eventually, she asked, "Are you two in a relationship?"

I lowered my eyes and nodded shyly. "Yes."

She smiled gently. "I'm not criticizing, but just be careful not to get pregnant before marriage."

"I am being careful," I assured her. "I know the consequences. We have to set up the hospital before getting married. If I get pregnant, the wedding will be rushed—and I'd rather avoid

that. But... how did you know we were together?"

"There's a glow on your face. It's obvious," she said.

I glanced at my reflection in the cupboard mirror. I didn't notice any difference in myself—perhaps because I see my face every day. But I thanked her for her advice, and we returned to the hall.

Kumar looked at me questioningly. I subtly nodded, indicating I'd explain later.

After lunch, we returned to his flat. As he pulled into his parking space, he struggled because a bike was in the way.

"Whose bike is this in your spot?" I asked.

"Mine," he replied casually.

"In that case, you owe me a ride," I grinned.

He smiled back. "Do you like ice cream?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Let's go, then."

He took me on a ride to Juhu Beach, where he bought us each a cup of ice cream. We sat on the sand, enjoyed the breeze, finished our ice cream, and then headed back.

When we got home, I changed and returned to the living room. He was sitting on the sofa, smoking.

Kumar looked at me and asked, "What did your parents say about me?"

"My dad was wondering how someone could get paid ₹50 lakhs just for a piece of software."

"To explain that," Kumar began, "I need to walk you through what happened. During a meeting, I pitched an idea for transferring data between branches using modems. Even the folks in the U.S. didn't know how to do that. They asked me to develop the code. I had a clear vision, much like I did for your hospital software. I created the program, tested it, and it worked. They installed it all across India and wanted to expand its use to their U.S. operations and subsidiaries."

"But here's the thing—they never gave me credit or even any incentive for it. Then I came up with another idea—software for a nationwide matrimonial service. I documented the concept and submitted it to our MD. Since the company had a pan-India presence and already used my data transfer software, it would be perfect."

"But instead of coming back to me, they assigned the task to another software developer. When I realized what was happening, I registered the idea and name with the patent office. Later, they couldn't link the new matrimonial service with

the data transfer software—because I hadn't shared that part. Their developer eventually came to me asking for the integration."

"I refused. Then I resigned and sent them a legal notice demanding they stop using my software. We negotiated, and they agreed to pay ₹50 lakhs for both the data transfer system and the matrimonial software rights."

I nodded, thoroughly impressed. "That's incredible. But who's Bob?"

"He's the one who encouraged me to learn software—and helped me out of a difficult situation."

"What happened?"

"When I was in the U.S., one of my Indian colleagues ran into some trouble, and I helped her return to India. She was too afraid to stay at her own house, so I let her stay in my flat. One night, I went to Wadala and stayed over. When I returned the next morning, there was a dead body in my hall, the door wide open, and people gathering outside. Someone called the police."

"They took the body for a post-mortem and brought me in for questioning. Since the murder happened in my apartment, I was the prime suspect."

I gasped. "How did they let you go?"

“Bob came to the police station and told them I was from the Intelligence Bureau, working undercover. That shut them up. They had no choice but to let me go. Later, I found out that the murdered person wasn’t the colleague I had brought back. She’s still missing—and to this day, there’s been no trace of her.”

“I heard you have a great technique of lovemaking, when will you show me?”

“Whenever you want.” After our lovemaking, he asked, “You said you heard about my lovemaking, where did you hear it?”

“I also studied in Dehradun. You were a sensation among the students back then. Everyone talked about you—there were even auctions just for a chance to spend time with you. Nimisha would select the top four bidders and collect the payments. I don’t know how much she paid you, but the girls were willing to spend a fortune just to be with you for a week. She had this rule that each girl could meet you only once, for one week.”

“There was even a rumour going around,” she continued, her voice softer now, “that if someone lost their virginity to you, they’d experience lifelong sexual satisfaction.”

“Didn’t you try to bid?” I asked.

"I did," she replied. "But I didn't have enough money. I had no idea you were even coming that year. I think you arrived a bit later. I saw Nimisha, but you weren't with her, and I was disappointed. I ended up spending my money on silly, useless things."

"Then, when you finally arrived, I was broke. I called my dad and asked for money, but by the time it reached me, you had already left."

She paused for a moment before continuing.

"That's when I made up my mind—if I were ever to lose my virginity, it would be to you, and only you. The following year, I saved up enough money to outbid any girl. But you didn't come. I tracked down Nimisha's address and visited her myself. She said she didn't know where you were, but gave me your old house address."

"When I went there, I was told you'd sold the house and moved to Bombay. No one knew your new address. From that moment, I didn't let any boy or man come near me. I waited. I believed you would return to me."

She looked into my eyes. "And when I saw you at the wedding, I couldn't believe it. I knew you came back for me. That's why I stayed behind instead of going to the wedding with my parents—because I knew you were mine."

I was silent for a moment, taking it all in.

"It's fascinating," I said finally, my voice sincere.
"That one girl would wait for me like this. Yours
is true love."

Chapter 4

I told Kumar I wanted a white veil—something like a net fabric. He said, “I know a seller near Andheri West station. I’ll take you there.”

We drove to the station, parked in the lot, and walked to the shop. When we arrived, a girl was already waiting there.

Kumar asked her, “Where’s the shopkeeper?”

She replied, “He must have gone for Namaz. He should be back shortly.”

Then Kumar looked at her closely and said, “Don’t you remember me?”

She squinted. “I was just thinking that—where have I seen you before?”

“I interviewed you once at the courier company. Did you get the job?”

“I did,” she replied, “but I’ve already left.”

“What are you doing now?”

“Nothing at the moment.”

Kumar scribbled his number on a slip of paper and handed it to her. “Call me. I’d like to speak with you. Meet Nandini, my fiancée.”

We shook hands, and he added, “Don’t forget to call. I might have something for you.”

When the shopkeeper returned, we bought the veil and began walking back to the parking lot. Suddenly, a man snatched my bag and ran off. Kumar tried to chase him, but the thief vanished into the crowd.

"My passport was in that bag," I said, distressed. "We need to file a police report and send the FIR to the passport office to get a replacement."

Kumar immediately took me to the Andheri West Police Station. We approached the constable on duty, and Kumar said, "We'd like to report a purse-snatching."

"Was there anything valuable in it?" the constable asked.

"Just my passport," I said.

"All right, give me a moment. I'll file the complaint," he said.

While waiting, Kumar glanced around and noticed a group of women sitting on a bench. "Why is that girl sitting with them?" he asked.

The constable replied, "She was caught with the group. The man over there is their pimp."

Kumar looked at the man and asked, "Is that Suresh?"

"Yes," the constable replied. "Do you know him?"

Before Kumar could respond, the Sub-Inspector stepped out of his office. Upon seeing Kumar, he came over, shook his hand, and asked quietly, "Are you here on official work?"

"Nothing like that," Kumar replied. "This is my fiancée, Nandini. Her bag was snatched near Andheri station. It had her passport in it."

"Don't worry," said the SI. "We'll find it."

Kumar then pointed to one of the girls and whispered, "I know her. I brought her from the USA—she's a software professional. She's the one who went missing after the murder case."

The SI looked concerned. "She's the one staying at your place?"

"Yes," Kumar replied. "I want both her and Suresh released to me. I'll get the truth from him and return him to you afterward."

The SI gave instructions to the constable to prepare the forms and release both to Kumar. He then turned to the constable and added, "Also, get that purse back. When they snatch bags, they should know whose they're stealing."

He handed the constable a slip of paper. "Note this number on the release form."

We left the station with Joy and Suresh in the car and drove to meet Deshpande, the *Shakha*

Pramukh at Vakola. Kumar dragged Suresh inside by the collar.

Deshpande stood up. "What's he done now?"

"I'm Kumar, son of Krishna from P&T Colony," Kumar said. "Remember? I came here once with Sahithi."

"Yes, of course. I remember. What's going on?"

"He's involved in pimping. This girl—Joy—is a software professional who was missing from my house. He's connected to her disappearance. I think he knows something about the murder case too."

Upon hearing the word 'murder,' Suresh panicked. "I don't know anything about any murder!"

"Then why was she with you?" Kumar asked.

Suresh explained nervously, "There's a gang that kidnaps people. Someone from the USA allegedly gave a *supari* to have her kidnapped. They locked her in a dark room. When the second payment didn't come, they decided to pimp her and handed her over to me. I was taking her to sell off when the police stopped our van and brought us all in. That's the truth."

Kumar looked at Joy, and she nodded silently.

"What do we do with him now?" Kumar asked Deshpande.

“We’ll hand him over to the Crime Bureau. You take her home, and we’ll follow up later.”

Kumar thanked him, reminded him to hand over Suresh, and dropped Joy off at her parents’ home. When we got back to his flat, he said, “I was really worried about Joy. Now that she’s safe, I can finally sleep peacefully.”

Later, we reviewed the hospital software together. I shared some suggestions, which Kumar noted down. He began coding while I worked quietly beside him until 8 p.m.

“If I keep working at this pace, I can finish the project within a week,” he said. “Let’s go out for dinner.”

We rode to a nearby restaurant on his bike, had dinner, and returned home.

Once back, I asked him, “Will it always be like this if we get married?”

He smiled. “I can’t promise that. Every day will be different. Will you be okay with that?”

I kissed him. “I know life with you will never be boring.”

He went back to coding, and I sat beside him, watching without interrupting.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I just want to finish this as soon as possible.”

"It's okay," I assured him. "Once it's done, you can install it at our hospital."

He worked until 11:30 p.m., then said, "Let's go to sleep." We were both exhausted, so we had a quiet, tender moment before falling asleep.

The Next Day

We visited Joy to check on her. She shared her harrowing story of being kidnapped and held by the gang.

Kumar told her, "That's all behind you now. I'm planning to start a software firm. Would you like to join as a partner?"

She agreed immediately.

"I'll arrange for you to stay in Hyderabad for a while," he said. "You don't need to be afraid anymore."

She readily agreed.

Later, we went to meet the Chartered Accountant to begin the company registration. We asked him to register the firm in all three of our names. After we signed the paperwork, the CA confirmed that he had already begun the process.

We dropped Joy back at her home and returned to the flat. Kumar resumed coding.

I prepared lunch and called him to eat. After lunch, he continued working. Once he completed a module, he started copying and reusing chunks of code to speed up development.

After finishing the second module, he lit a cigarette and leaned back.

I walked over and asked, "Would you like a cup of tea?"

He looked at me for a moment. "Yes, please."

I noticed he was staring at me thoughtfully. "What are you looking at?" I asked.

"I'm just thinking how beautiful you look right now," he said softly.

I blushed. "Thanks."

He stood up, kissed me, and said, "Stay just as considerate always."

I smiled. "I promise."

I went into the kitchen, brought him a cup of tea, and placed it on the table.

Without a word, he pulled me onto his lap and kissed me deeply. I kissed him back, equally passionate.

"I'm sorry," he said softly.

"For what?" I asked.

"I was afraid you'd leave me someday. Promise me you won't."

"Why are you saying that?" I asked, surprised.

"No matter what happens between us," he said, "promise me you'll never leave."

"I promise," I replied gently.

He let me get up and turned back to his computer, diving into his code.

After completing another module, he leaned back and lit a cigarette. I brought him another cup of tea and placed it in front of him.

He looked at me with a smile. "Thanks."

Once he finished the tea, he stretched and said, "Let's go for a walk."

We walked to a nearby super bazaar and returned with grocery bags in our hands. On the way, he spotted a woman approaching and stopped her.

"Aunty, I'm sorry," he said.

She paused, looked at him carefully, and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I've started a software development firm," he said, as if explaining his presence in the city. Then he added, "I'm sorry about Sunitha."

I instantly understood—she was Sunitha's mother.

"I should be the one apologizing," she said quietly. "Sunitha left the house that day after a fight. She was angry with me. I should've listened to her. She told me it was all a misunderstanding—someone had filled her ears with lies because she was jealous of you being close to another girl. By the time she realized you were innocent, it was too late. She had already called off the wedding, and we never heard from her again."

"She told me the day she left," the woman continued, her voice cracking, "that you'd created some software and were doing well—that you weren't after her money. We barely have ₹10 lakhs in total, including the value of our house."

"I received ₹50 lakhs after taxes for that software," Kumar said quietly.

"She was right then. I just hope... she's alive somewhere."

"I still believe she is," he said. "She'll come back to us one day."

"I pray your words come true," she replied.

We walked back to the flat.

"That was Sunitha's mother, wasn't it?" I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

When we got home, he placed the bags in the kitchen and returned to his computer. He looked thoughtful—clearly lost in memories of Sunitha. I pulled up a chair beside him and placed my hand gently on his shoulder, trying to offer silent support.

He looked up Deshpande’s number and called.

“I’m Kumar,” he said. “I brought you Suresh the other day. Any update on his case?”

Deshpande must have asked something.

“No, he’s out of town. I was asking about his activities—anything new?”

Deshpande said something else.

“I’ll be leaving Bombay for a while to install hospital software in Hyderabad. Once I return, I’ll come meet you.”

He thanked him and ended the call.

Just as he was about to speak to me, his phone rang again. He picked it up. “Hello?”

He listened, then replied, “Yes, we just went to the super bazaar. I believe you’re in Andheri East? Shall we meet at the restaurant near Andheri station?”

After a brief pause, he said, “Okay, I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

We took the bike and parked outside the restaurant. Inside, we saw a group already seated. A girl—Mahira—introduced the others: Chowdary, Rakesh, and Salim.

“I’m Kumar,” he said, as we took the table next to theirs.

Mahira sat across from us.

“I’m starting a software firm,” he told her, “and I want you to handle the hardware division.”

“Why hardware? Why not software?” she asked.

“I know your background. You’d face challenges selling software. But hardware suits you. I also have other business ideas—I’ll share them when the time is right.”

Mahira narrowed her eyes. “How do you know so much about me?”

“Your father works at the airport, your sister’s with Indian Airlines, and your brother is in the merchant navy. You live in IC Colony. I know all this from your biodata. You didn’t resign from the courier company—they asked you to leave, though I don’t know the exact reason.”

She looked startled.

“You probably have a friend named Dolly,” he added. “I suggest you stay away from her. She’s dangerous. And those friends of yours—Rakesh is into drugs, Chowdary is obsessed with

astrology, and Salim... I don't know much about him. But I believe he works on compact fire extinguishers."

Mahira glanced at Salim. "He does."

Then, turning back to Kumar, she asked in a low voice, "Are you a spy?"

"Nothing like that. I saw your life in a dream."

She frowned. "How could you possibly see my life in a dream?"

"If I told you the truth, you wouldn't believe me. But if you want to work with me, I'll get the hardware division set up."

"Can I get back to you on that?"

"Of course. Take your time."

He lit a cigarette and offered the pack to her.

"How did you know I smoke?"

"I know your whole life," he said with a calm smile. "Don't worry—I won't use anything against you."

Mahira studied him, clearly intrigued—and perhaps slightly unnerved.

"What were you saying about Dolly?" she asked. "We've recently been in touch. She invited me to a party next week."

"Then invite me too. I'd like to meet her."

She looked at him for a long moment. "If I arrange for some expensive Scotch, would that help?"

Kumar chuckled. "Sure. I'll bring a bottle. Let me know."

"I'll talk to her and see," Mahira said, still clearly assessing the mystery of him.

After listening to Kumar's conversation with Mahira, I began to wonder—was he actually working as a spy? How else could he know so much about her? Even the Sub-Inspector had hinted that Kumar worked for the Intelligence Bureau. Mahira had been visibly shocked by how much he knew.

But then, there was his work. The way he coded—it was like watching a master at his craft. I'd seen programmers working back in the USA, and compared to them, Kumar was on another level. While they flipped through books or scrolled through forums to figure out which commands to use, he never paused. He didn't consult a single reference or stop to think. His hands flew across the keyboard, the code flowing effortlessly. He only stopped to check once an entire module was done.

He once told me he learned coding on the advice of someone named Bob. But who was this Bob really? One moment, Kumar says Bob encouraged him to study software and helped

him become the head of a business conglomerate. Another time, Bob appeared out of nowhere to rescue him after a murder occurred in his flat.

Wait—was someone actually murdered in his flat? That detail still haunted me. How could he not be terrified by that? I know I would be. I wouldn't feel safe spending even one night there without him.

I silently prayed he wouldn't leave me alone. It had only been a few days with him, and already, I couldn't imagine staying without him by my side. What would I do when I had to return to Hyderabad? If I must go, I'll either take him with me or stay back here with him. I don't care what anyone else thinks.

But his mother's words echoed in my head—I needed to be careful about getting pregnant. She was right. There was no urgency to start a family. For now, I should focus on my career and building our hospital.

That night, we returned to the flat after having dinner at a restaurant. Kumar got right back to work, and by 11:15 p.m., he had completed yet another module.

He lit a cigarette and glanced over at me. I was half-dozing on the sofa, trying not to disturb him.

He must have felt sorry for me, watching me struggle to stay awake. He came over, sat beside me, and gently kissed me.

I opened my eyes. "Did you finish your work?"

"I've wrapped up for today," he replied. "Come, let's go to bed."

He picked me up in his arms and carried me to the bedroom. After placing me gently on the bed, he went back, turned off the lights, and returned to lie down beside me.

I was already drifting back to sleep. He lay beside me silently, his presence a quiet comfort in the dark.

By the time I woke up, Kumar was already at his computer, deep into work. I came up behind him, wrapped my arms around his neck, and kissed him on the cheek.

"Good morning," I whispered, then turned his head toward me and kissed him on the lips.

"I've already completed another module," he said, smiling. "Only the reporting section is left now. For cost-saving, most hospitals use dot matrix printers, but some prefer laser for diagnostic reports. Let me know your preferred printing method."

Then he asked, "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

“Yes, I’ll just freshen up first,” I replied and went to the bathroom.

By the time I returned, he had already placed two steaming cups of coffee on the table next to his keyboard. I sat down beside him. He handed me one cup and picked up the other.

We sipped our coffee together quietly. After I finished mine, still holding the cup in both hands, I looked at him. He leaned over, took my face in his hands, kissed me, and said, “You look so beautiful.”

I played along, putting on an innocent expression. “How much?”

He spread his hands a little. “This much.”

“Only that much?” I teased.

He opened his arms fully. “Then... this much.”

I laughed, kissed him again, and just like that, our day had begun.

Kumar compiled the code and created an executable file. “Check the application while I go take a shower,” he said as he walked to the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

I knocked and asked, “What would you like for breakfast?”

“Whatever you can make,” he replied from inside.

I opened the door slightly, peeked in playfully, and he blew me an air kiss. Smiling, I headed to the kitchen.

After his shower, he got dressed and sat on the sofa, deep in thought.

“What’s on your mind?” I asked.

“I’ve decided it’s worth meeting Dolly—just to confirm if she’s the one I saw in my dream,” he said.

“When did you dream about her?”

“In the dream, I was trying to find out if Dolly was the one who murdered the other version of me in that timeline. She feels connected to my life somehow. Joy is the link. In one timeline, Dolly kidnapped Joy to sabotage a software company. Here, she was kidnapped for ransom, paid by someone from the U.S. Could someone really hate her enough to get her locked away like that?”

I brought him a plate of Upma and placed it in front of him.

“Upma?” he said, a little surprised.

“It was the easiest thing to make. You don’t like it?”

“No, it’s fine. Could I get a cup of tea too?”

"Of course." I brought him tea and sat beside him on the sofa.

He looked at me sincerely. "Sorry for making you do all this. If you were staying here long-term, I would've hired a maid. But I live alone, and I don't want gossiping maids around. If I were married, it would be different—the wife would handle all that."

"I understand," I said.

"Don't worry, it's only for a few more days while we finish our work. I could have taken you to my parents' house, but we wouldn't have this kind of freedom there."

"I get that. I want to be with you—not with your family. Every day, you grow closer to me. I don't know how I'll manage in Hyderabad without you."

"Then let's get married soon," he said. "That way, we can be together, and no one will object."

Just then, the phone rang. He picked it up. "It's Mahira. She says the party is set for Saturday evening—we're invited."

"Okay," I said.

"Nandini, get ready—we need to go to Vakola."

"Alright," I said, heading to take a bath.

While I was getting ready, he called Joy and asked her to be ready to discuss the business plan.

Once I was ready, we both went to Joy's place. The three of us sat down to plan our development activities.

Joy asked, "Didn't you say you'd take me to Hyderabad?"

"I'm looking at all options," Kumar replied. "Would you prefer working from home? I can set you up with a computer. But first, let's go to Vakola and check on the investigation progress."

On the way, he asked her, "Joy, can you share more details about your time with the kidnappers? Do you know who the leader might be?"

"The leader was a woman," Joy said. "She spoke with a Bengali accent."

"That's helpful," Kumar nodded. "It's a clue."

When we reached the Vakola station, we inquired about Sahithi's disappearance.

Deshpande said, "No new leads yet. Suresh doesn't seem to know where they were kept."

Kumar asked, "What about Sahithi's family? Where did they vanish to? I doubt they went abroad. I think there's a locksmith near the bus stop—let's take him to their house and check it."

We picked up the locksmith and brought him to Sahithi's locked house. After about 20 minutes of working on the door, he managed to open it.

A stale, musty odor filled the air as we stepped inside. The floor seemed... uneven.

Kumar paused, looking around. "Something terrible happened here. Better call the police."

We stepped outside, and by then, a small crowd had gathered. A neighbor asked, "What's going on, Dada?"

Deshpande turned to the group, "Does anyone here have a phone?"

The neighbor next door replied, "We do."

Deshpande used their phone to call the police. They arrived within 10 minutes. After inspecting the floor, the Sub-Inspector said, "These floor tiles seem to have been replaced recently."

He called in a specialist team, who removed the tiles and dug beneath. There, they found two skeletons. The house was sealed immediately—this was now a full-fledged homicide investigation.

Kumar looked to Deshpande. "What should we do now?"

"Go home," Deshpande said. "I'll talk to you later."

Kumar gave him his contact number and drove us to Raj's house. He left us in the car, went in, and returned with Raj.

He handed Raj a cigarette and said, "There's a party at Dolly's. I want you there. We need to stage a scene to impress some guests. I've already signed a contract and received the payment, but it's important they know my current status."

He also updated Raj on the bodies found in Sahithi's house and the urgency of locating her.

Raj replied, "I'll bring a few friends to the party. We'll put on a show—they'll be impressed."

Kumar then introduced me as his fiancée and Joy as our software development partner. He invited Raj to work with us if he was interested.

"I'll think about it," Raj said, and took Kumar's number.

Back at the flat, Kumar asked Joy to go over the hospital software he'd developed, while the two of us went into the kitchen to prepare lunch.

It was Saturday night, and we were headed to Dolly's house, where the party was being hosted. On the way, Kumar picked up Raj, who said, "Harry, Shekar, and Julie will be coming in Shekar's car."

We followed the directions Mahira had given us: take the SV Road, then turn right at Santacruz West, go to the end where the road curves toward Juhu Beach, and take a left. At the end of that road stood a row of bungalows on the right-hand side—the last one was our destination, located in an area known as Juhu Koliwada.

We pulled into the parking area in front of the bungalow and stepped out. Mahira was waiting for us at the entrance and greeted us warmly. She led us inside to meet Dolly.

Dolly's features were striking. She looked Bengali—about five-foot-two, plump, yet curvaceous. Her round face was caked in full makeup, and she wore a glamorous, flowing party gown straight out of a Hindi movie—the kind typically worn by vamps or dancers that highlighted every curve.

To me, she looked every inch the villain. Maybe it was Kumar's stories about her that shaped my first impression.

Mahira introduced Kumar.

Dolly shook his hand and asked, "What do you do?"

"I'm starting a software business," Kumar replied calmly.

Dolly glanced at Mahira for confirmation.

Mahira added, "He recently sold a software product to a global company and received a substantial payment."

Dolly raised an eyebrow. "How substantial?"

"After taxes, he received fifty lakhs," Mahira answered smoothly.

Dolly's eyes widened. "Wow. That *is* substantial—for just a piece of software." She turned back to Kumar. "How long did it take you to build it?"

"About two to three days," Kumar replied, casually.

Dolly looked skeptical, and glanced again at Mahira as if seeking reassurance.

Mahira explained, "He gave them the software, then filed for copyright and a patent. After that, he served a legal notice asking them to stop using it. They had already deployed it across all their Indian branches and were planning to use it internationally. So, the parent company contacted him directly, offered a contract, and paid him for the rights."

Dolly gave a sly smile. "Intelligent *and* cunning."

Kumar had clearly gotten the reaction he wanted.

He turned to me. "This is Nandini, my fiancée. She runs a hospital in Hyderabad."

“Runs?” Dolly asked with a curious smile.

“It’s their family-owned hospital,” Kumar clarified. “She came to me for hospital software, and things clicked between us. Our families have formalized our engagement.”

Then he gestured toward Joy. “And this is Joy, our partner in software development.”

I watched Dolly closely for her reaction. She seemed to recognize Joy’s name but didn’t appear to have made direct eye contact with her yet. There was a flicker of surprise on her face, perhaps from seeing Joy here with us—and as our business partner no less. I sensed she was mentally noting it down, maybe planning to deal with her later.

Just then, Raj and the rest of the group arrived. Kumar introduced him with ease. “This is Raj—he’s joining us as well. Shekar runs a bar and restaurant in Santacruz East. Harry is preparing to go abroad.”

Julie, who hadn’t been introduced yet, looked at Kumar expectantly. Before he could speak, she introduced herself: “I’m Krishna. I work with an air conditioner firm.”

She was tall, slim, and spoke fluent English—unsurprising, as she was from Goa.

After the introductions were over, Dolly smiled and said, “Please enjoy the party,” before

heading off to greet another couple who had just arrived.

Saturday night, we arrived at Dolly's house where the party was being hosted. On the way, Kumar picked up Raj. He told us, "Harry, Shekhar, and Julie will be coming in Shekhar's car."

We followed Mahira's directions carefully: take SV Road, turn right at Santacruz West, drive to the end of the road, turn left just before the road curves toward Juhu Beach, and continue straight until the last bungalow on the right, in an area known as Juhu Koliwada.

We parked in front of the bungalow. Mahira met us at the entrance and led us to the backyard where the party was happening. We took a seat at a table, and a waiter came over to take our order.

A man soon approached Kumar and introduced himself as Rakesh Khanna. Kumar stood up, shook his hand, and the two of them stepped aside to talk privately.

He returned about ten minutes later.

Raj, pointing to Kumar's untouched drink, joked, "Your drink's waiting."

"You can have it," Kumar said casually and ordered another. He barely sipped it—just enough to play the part.

Later, Dolly announced that dinner was being served, and guests began moving toward the dining area. We waited for a while before Rakesh returned and invited us to join for dinner.

After dinner, I noticed Dolly quietly selecting certain guests and ushering them inside the house.

When we finished eating, Rakesh returned and asked Kumar to accompany him. Kumar followed him inside and didn't return for nearly an hour. When he came back, he told Raj to visit us the next day, and we left, dropping Joy off at her house before heading home.

Back at the flat, I asked, "What did you find out?"

"There's definitely a link between the kidnappers and Dolly's gang," Kumar said grimly. "Sahithi seems to have been kidnapped by them too. Rakesh claims he'll find her and bring her to me. Joy was likely abducted by the same network."

He leaned back, tired but focused. "They're running auctions in that house, Nandini—for kidnapped girls. It's a huge operation. We'll need police support to shut it down, but I want to wait until we find Sahithi. That's the priority."

His words haunted me.

Why was he so determined to find Sahithi? What would happen if he actually found her? Would he leave me and go back to her?

From what Kumar described, this gang kidnapped girls, broke their spirits, and forced them into prostitution. First, they were locked in dark rooms to instill fear, then given the “choice” of death or sex work. Most chose survival.

Joy was lucky. If the police hadn’t intercepted her transfer, she might’ve vanished forever.

And Sahithi... if she’s alive, what kind of state would she be in? Was Kumar trying to save her because he still loved her—or because she was Leena’s mother?

I couldn’t be Leena’s real mother. No matter what I did, that part of his past wasn’t mine.

By the time we got home, it was late. Kumar lay down and called me over to sit beside him.

“You don’t have to worry about Sahithi,” he said gently. “It was a one-night stand. I agreed to marry her only after Sunitha rejected me—and even then, she ruined that wedding too. Now she’s gone. Our parents have committed to this relationship, and I stand by their word.”

He paused, choosing his words carefully. “If I find Sahithi, I just want to help her rebuild her life. Maybe help her get a job. Nothing more. Are you okay with that?”

“You’ve always been my priority,” I replied. “I have no problem with it.”

He kissed me softly. "It's late. Get some sleep."

The Next Morning

Raj called and said he'd be dropping by, along with Shekhar and Julie. Kumar gave him our address, and they arrived within the hour.

Kumar had already placed a whiskey bottle on the table—he knew Raj's weakness. I brought out some snacks while Kumar poured drinks and served them.

He turned to the group and asked, "So, what's your opinion of Dolly?"

Shekhar replied, "She's trying too hard to impress. Always pulling people toward her."

Raj added, "Most guests were either couples or men, and she singled out single men—just like you said—for the auctions."

Kumar nodded. "Let me explain the auction system. They close the doors and bring out the girls one by one. Bidding starts at ₹1,000. If the men like a girl, they raise the bid. The highest bidder gets the girl delivered wherever he wants. He can keep her or return her."

He paused grimly. "Returned girls go back into circulation. Basically, they're used as prostitutes. I believe Sahithi was auctioned like this. Rakesh is trying to track her down. Once we know her

location, I'll bring in the police. If we wait too long, we may never find her."

Krishna asked, "How do you plan to involve the police?"

"The Sub-Inspector at Andheri West knows me," Kumar explained. "He thinks I'm undercover IB. I'll give him the information discreetly and let him take the credit for busting the gang—on the condition that he keeps my name out of it."

He looked around. "So, what's your final verdict? Are they running a trafficking ring?"

Everyone nodded in agreement.

I stepped in. "Should I start cooking rice?"

"Sure," Kumar said. "But first, bring some chicken for *chakna*."

They finished the bottle over snacks and then sat down for lunch. After eating, Kumar told them they could nap in the second bedroom or on the sofa if they wanted to rest.

He and I returned to the hospital software. We reviewed and implemented the changes I had suggested, working quietly and efficiently until 6 p.m.

Later, the others came out from the second bedroom, looking refreshed. Raj said, "We'll head home now."

Kumar nodded, and they left.

We waited for a week, but there was no word from Rakesh. So, Kumar and I decided it was time to head to Hyderabad to complete the hospital software installation. He informed Raj about our departure and gave him my number, asking him to keep us updated on any activity from Dolly's side. He also notified Mahira and asked her to look into dealership opportunities for computer hardware and to explore the possibility of renting out bungalows for movie shootings.

Kumar called his mother and said, "I'm going to Hyderabad to implement the hospital software. I'll be there for at least a week."

She called back shortly after. "I just spoke with Nandini's mother. We've decided to hold the engagement next week."

We booked flight tickets and flew to Hyderabad. We checked into a hotel near the hospital, registering both our names.

Phase 1: Implementation Begins

Our work started with placing orders for the hospital's computer systems. Next, we coordinated networking, which required calling in a specialist from Bombay. We also sourced the hardware from Bombay and arranged for it to be shipped to Hyderabad. Having Mahira and Raj

managing operations there proved to be a big help—our hardware business had officially launched alongside the hospital project.

I convinced Dad to let me stay with Kumar during this phase so we could work more effectively.

After a week of reviewing suitable *muhurats*, Kumar's family arrived in Hyderabad, and our engagement ceremony was held in grand fashion. Though only Mahira could attend from Bombay, many of our local relatives were present, including Kumar's cousins. They must have been secretly envious seeing the two of us together.

Phase 2: Hyderabad Hospital Goes Digital

Our hardware shipment finally arrived from Bombay. I began preparing the computers for deployment. With networking completed, we tested the systems and began training the hospital staff. The entire process took over a month, but eventually, we were ready for the official launch.

The hospital became the **first in Hyderabad—and possibly all of Andhra—to adopt computerized hospital management.**

Once everything was in place, Kumar returned to Bombay, leaving me in charge. He promised he'd

be back soon, after settling the matter concerning Sahithi.

Phase 3: Bombay Business Expansion

A few weeks later, I took leave from the hospital and appointed an assistant to manage operations in my absence. I reassured her that she could always call me if needed.

Back in Bombay, I began assisting Kumar at the firm and visiting local hospitals to pitch our software. We soon completed a project with Godrej and secured a significant contract with Reliance's Vimal brand.

When our idea to rent out our bungalow didn't pan out, we decided to repurpose it. The **ground floor became our hardware showroom and office**, while the **first floor was converted into our assembly unit** for computers.

Kumar brought Mahira, Raj, and Krishna in as **equal partners (10% each)** in the hardware division, in addition to their salaries.

- Mahira handled **marketing**
- Raj managed **distribution**
- Krishna supervised **production**

Phase 4: Sahithi, the Takeover & The Operation

Kumar convinced Sahithi to resign from her job at Godrej and handed over the management of our software division to her. The duties he once envisioned for Sunitha—he now entrusted to Sahithi.

Regarding Dolly and her trafficking ring, Kumar collaborated with the **Andheri Station SI**, who had since been promoted to the **CID Division**. The operation to dismantle Dolly's gang was underway.

To monitor Dolly discreetly, Kumar recruited two constables and stationed them as watchmen outside our bungalow. He even purchased the *paan* shop opposite Dolly's bungalow and had one constable work there undercover as a *paanwala*.

This constable regularly attended Dolly's auctions. Though he never placed bids, his presence went unquestioned due to his rising familiarity. Occasionally, if a girl went unbid, he would buy her at the base price, then:

- Reunite her with her family, **or**
- Offer employment and training within our company if she had nowhere to go.

Phase 5: Dismantling Dolly's Network

When Kumar received intel about girl transports, he passed it discreetly to CID. The police would raid the convoys, arresting the gang members.

This method steadily eroded Dolly's operation. The SI kept Kumar's name confidential—believing him to be an undercover IB officer—and credited the information to his constables. This approach kept corrupt officers from leaking details to Dolly.

Dolly remained clueless about who was behind her organization's downfall. Kumar even played along, blaming the recent arrests on her gang's carelessness, saying they had grown too bold and ignored warnings.

The pressure escalated:

- Gang members grew too scared to kidnap new girls.
- Bringing girls into Bombay became nearly impossible.
- Their operations, especially from rural areas, were being intercepted.

Eventually, **Dolly's business collapsed**. She had not renewed her bungalow lease, and it became clear she was preparing to flee the city.

In a **midnight sweep**, the police arrested Dolly, Rakesh, and other key gang members. Information extracted from these arrests led to

a wave of follow-up raids, capturing the remaining members one by one.

Phase 6: Marriage Plans

With the danger behind us, our parents finalized our wedding. Kumar offered to host the ceremonies at our bungalow. The spacious backyard was perfect for the functions, and a couple of rooms were reserved for our families to stay comfortably.

Chapter 5

When Mom told me they were going to speak with Kumar's parents about finalizing our marriage, I could hardly contain my joy. I must have literally jumped in excitement.

Our families probably suspected that Kumar and I were living together, but they couldn't object—after all, we were business partners, and everyone could clearly see how fast the company had grown. We were getting contracts from major clients, and business was booming. We'd even hired a traveling manager just to handle client site visits.

We didn't need to pitch our software anymore; clients were approaching us with custom development requests.

Joy had taken complete charge of the software development division, building a team of developers based on her vision. Kumar reviewed the final versions, tested them meticulously, and handled the release. He had a rare knack for spotting bugs—bugs that, if left unchecked, could've damaged our reputation. His sharp attention to detail saved us more than once.

When Kumar offered to host the wedding at our bungalow, both families agreed immediately. Interestingly, we had just rented the same bungalow Dolly had vacated, and the owners gave us a reduced rent on the police's

recommendation. They were still shaken, worried about what action the authorities might take for having previously rented it to a criminal gang.

Kumar suggested that we start living in the newly rented bungalow—and we did.

The Wedding & Reception

Our wedding was grand, and the reception in our new backyard was even grander. To promote our business, we installed display screens showcasing videos of our software products and services. It was a beautiful fusion of celebration and brand-building.

Guests came from all over India. Among them was a couple from Manali who immediately caught Kumar's attention.

They came on stage to present us with a gift, and Raj introduced them as Mr. and Mrs. Singhania from Manali. They were looking for hospital management software.

To my surprise, Kumar spoke to Mrs. Singhania in Telugu. "How are you doing?" he asked. She seemed to understand but responded in Hindi.

Kumar leaned over to Raj and whispered something. Raj left, returned briefly to whisper

something back, and left again. I looked at Kumar curiously.

"What's going on between you and Raj?" I asked.

Kumar smiled. "I'm planning our honeymoon."

"Oh really? Where to?" I asked, excited.

"Manali," he said.

I turned and kissed him on the cheek. Right then, the photographer clicked a perfect candid. I smiled at him and let it go—maybe it would make for a beautiful memory.

Later, while we were receiving blessings, Kumar's grandmother asked one of the relatives, "Is she Sneha?"

Kumar chuckled and said, "No, grandma. Sneha used to visit our home often. This is Nandini."

"I must've forgotten. Age is catching up with me," she replied warmly.

Then his father's elder sister asked, "How much money do you have now?"

Kumar smiled, "I stopped counting. Maybe a crore."

His uncle from Madras said, "I always knew you'd do well. I saw the spark in you early on."

After the ceremonies, we moved into our newly rented bungalow. That night, after all the

traditional rituals were done, we finally retired to our room.

As we sat on the bed, I asked, "When are we leaving for the trip?"

"Prathap is arranging everything," Kumar said. "We'll fly to Delhi, and then drive to Manali with him and his wife, Preethi."

The Manali Trip

Two days later, we headed to the airport, where we met Prathap and Preethi. We flew together to Delhi and from there took a road trip to Manali.

Throughout the flight, Preethi sat beside me, chatting warmly. At one point, she asked how I met Kumar and how our marriage was arranged.

I kept it simple. "We met at his sister's wedding. Our mothers liked the idea and fixed the match."

I didn't mention our time living together. Some things are best left unsaid.

During the trip, Preethi and I became close, and Prathap and Kumar quickly bonded. They discussed business and future ventures. Prathap was curious about how Kumar started his software firm, especially given his non-technical background.

Kumar told him everything—from how Bob encouraged him to learn software, to his work at the courier company, to how he used that experience to build his own company. He even shared how we developed hospital software for my family's hospital and how we managed to take over Dolly's old bungalow.

Kumar, in turn, asked how Prathap had met Preethi.

Prathap explained that while inspecting a hotel site in Guwahati, he met her. She was working there, helping coordinate workers. He was impressed by her intelligence and insight. Upon digging into her background, he found out she had been discovered unconscious near a riverbank and had no memory of her past—she was suffering from amnesia. They took her in, and she became an integral part of their lives.

We landed in Delhi where a car was waiting for us. Prathap sat in the front, and Kumar ended up seated between Preethi and me.

"It's a long drive—15 to 16 hours," Prathap said. "We'll rotate seats along the way."

After a couple of hours on the road, I began to doze off. I rested my head on Kumar's shoulder. At one point, the driver braked suddenly. I shifted in my sleep, and Kumar gently adjusted my head on his shoulder again.

Later, as it got dark, we stopped for supper. We stretched, used the restrooms, and ordered food. Kumar finished quickly and wandered a bit before returning to his seat in the middle.

As the journey resumed, I noticed Kumar chatting with Preethi in Telugu. When Prathap asked about it, Kumar said, "She's from our village. We're just speaking in our language."

That seemed to satisfy Prathap, who didn't question it further.

In Manali

We arrived in Manali around 10 a.m. A hotel boy took our luggage, and Prathap told us their room was on the same floor.

Kumar shook hands with him and said, "I'll take some rest. See you in the evening."

We bathed, had breakfast, and then fell asleep. I woke up after four or five hours and nudged Kumar to join me for lunch.

After eating, he lit a cigarette and stepped out to the balcony. When he returned through the main door, I asked, "Where did you go?"

"I went to see Preethi's daughter," he replied.

"Okay," I said, letting it go.

An Unexpected Turn

The next day, a sightseeing trip had been arranged—a full-day group tour planned by Prathap. But from early morning, Kumar began showing signs of stomach trouble. He seemed to have a bout of diarrhoea.

I offered to cancel the trip, but he insisted, “No, you go ahead. I’ll join you the next time. Prathap will be there to keep you company.”

After some persuasion, I agreed and went with the group.

I returned in the evening to find him still in bed.

“Did you eat anything?” I asked.

He shook his head. “Just had some tea.”

“I’ll order you something,” I said.

He looked at me seriously. “Nandini, I think the water or weather here doesn’t suit me. Let’s go back.”

We got in touch with Prathap, who arranged our return journey to Delhi and helped book a flight back to Bombay. We stayed one more night in Manali before heading to Delhi and then flew home.

Chapter 6

After Sunitha was found alive, Kumar changed. He became calm, withdrawn, and deeply focused on his work. His brilliance in software development seemed to intensify. Sometimes, he'd wake up in the middle of the night and start scribbling ideas furiously—ideas that by morning would become blueprints for revolutionary software. He would discuss them with Joy, and some concepts were pitched to major corporations and even to government bodies.

He started importing telephone modems and proposed using them to bring the internet to India. When officials asked about connectivity, he bluntly stated, *"That's the government's job. They should act now."*

Kumar also bought a white suit with a dark grey shirt for Leena's birthday party. He had gone bald after donating his hair at Tirupati, and seeing him in that outfit made me laugh out loud.

At the party, he proudly introduced Leena as his daughter and Sahithi as her mother. When someone asked if Sahithi was his wife, he turned to me and said, *"Meet my wife, Nandini."* The man, clearly embarrassed, was later informed that Leena was Sahithi's daughter and had been adopted by Kumar.

I had left my hospital responsibilities to work with Kumar full-time. Though I had appointed someone to oversee hospital operations, I wondered if the company could function without him. My father understood my devotion and never pressured me to return.

Everything was going smoothly—until that day.

A Surprise Invitation

It was the eve of Kumar's birthday, and he was busy organizing the party. That evening, he took me to our neighbour's bungalow. The watchman, already familiar with us, opened the gate and led us to the door. A servant answered and invited us to sit on the sofa while she informed her employer.

Then she walked in—Loveleen. She was stunning. Probably the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in person. Around 5'3", with a graceful figure, and an aura of elegance that even I, as a woman, found a bit intimidating.

Kumar stood up and introduced us. *"Hi, Loveleen. We're your neighbours—Kumar and my wife, Nandini."*

I was curious—how did he know her name? Likely through the staff.

Loveleen looked at us thoughtfully, trying to place us. Then she smiled, motioned for us to sit, and sat across from us.

Kumar said, *"We're hosting a party this Saturday and came to invite you."*

She asked, *"What's the occasion?"*

"It's my birthday," he replied with a charming smile.

She raised an eyebrow. *"And how old will you be?"*

"Twenty-five."

"What do you do?"

"We run a software and computer hardware firm—one on either side of your bungalow," he said casually.

"Oh," she nodded. "So I'm surrounded."

Kumar smiled. *"We're your security, Loveleen."*

She looked at him curiously. *"Do I know you?"*

He replied smoothly, *"You may not remember me, but I know everything about you."*

"And what exactly do you know?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

"You were born and raised in Delhi. You run an interior design firm. Your father is a mix of business and politics—he's aiming to become

the Chief Minister of Haryana. And he'll need me to help him achieve that."

She stared, stunned. Very few people knew about her family's ambitions.

Before she could say more, I added, *"I can look into the future... and I could tell you about your husband—"*

He paused deliberately.

Loveleen, clearly shaken, looked at Kumar and said quietly, *"Come meet me at 10 a.m. tomorrow."* She handed him her card.

He tucked it into his pocket without looking at it.

As we walked out, I turned to him. *"What just happened? How do you know all this?"*

"I told you—I know everything about her. And her father needs our help."

"Why?"

"Because I know a secret that could change everything."

Whispers of the Future

Later that night, Kumar told me that her would-be husband was impotent.

"How do you even know that?" I asked.

"I've read the future—in a book," he replied.

"A book? You read the future?"

"Yes. The events are slightly out of order, but I'm following the business path laid out in that book. So far, it's been successful."

"Except that movie rental idea."

"That was premature. But we didn't lose anything. And we turned the space into our hardware office, so it worked out."

He then told me about his next plan: national expansion.

"We need capital for real estate investments in South India. That's why I want Loveleen to invest."

"Don't we have enough capital?"

"My funds are locked in the software and hardware divisions. I don't want to touch your family's money—I married you because I love you, not for your wealth. And I won't let anyone say otherwise."

It struck me again how different he was from so many men. He'd never taken a dowry. Instead, he made me his partner in the company—no strings attached.

Early Morning Call

The next morning, at 6:30 a.m., the bell rang. It was Loveleen's watchman.

"She wants to see you," the man said.

When Kumar returned, I asked, *"Why did she call so early?"*

"Her mother called last night. They've fixed her marriage. But the groom is impotent."

Again, he insisted this was from the book he'd read, or dreams passed from his 'other self' in the future. He claimed the timelines had diverged, but he was still trying to follow key business paths that led to major success.

He spoke of Sahithi, Sunitha, and even Dolly—acknowledging how life events had shifted. *"All the women from the story are gone. You were just a friend in that timeline. Here, you're my wife."*

He said his goal was simple: make Loveleen's father a CM. If he succeeded, the political influence would guarantee his business would expand faster. If not, he'd have to rethink investment options.

I asked, *"And what about this man she's supposed to marry? You called him Guru?"*

He nodded.

"How will you find out the truth?"

"I'll send a girl from a known list to him and see how he responds."

I was stunned. *"You're using a call girl?"*

"Yes. If he's what I suspect, he'll try to recruit her for his 'hospitality' ventures—using her to entertain his clients."

He smiled at me and said, *"Let's get some sleep. Tomorrow will be busy."*

Trust, Doubt & Love

I lay awake wondering. Could he really see the future? Or was he simply brilliant at reading people? Either way, one thing was clear—he had never wavered in his love or loyalty to me. He'd stayed away from women despite his past. Joy respected boundaries. Dolly failed to trap him. Even Sahithi was given freedom, not love.

Still, Loveleen... she was different. Young. Powerful. Unmarried. Beautiful. And suddenly very involved in our lives.

But then again—he introduced me to her as his wife. He wasn't hiding me. And that meant something.

Reflection

The phone rang—Joy, calling from the office about a project delivery. I told her we'd be there shortly. I went to see Kumar dressing, kissed him, and told him about the call.

He smiled and said, *"Let's go have breakfast."*

As I watched him walk away, I couldn't help but admire the man he'd become. Composed, visionary, and morally grounded. He never drank excessively, stayed fit, and treated people with respect.

"Keep your friends close, enemies closer—but keep your customers closest," he always said.

Late Evening Confession

That night, Kumar returned home late.

"Where were you?" I asked.

"I was with Loveleen. Her father's coming to the party tomorrow—probably to discuss politics."

"And what do you know about politics?"

"I'll learn. That's not the hard part."

After dinner, we sat in the backyard, enjoying the breeze. He reflected aloud, *"Trying to match someone else's future is hard. Our lives are already different from the book. The timeline doesn't align exactly. But the goal is the same—to build something great."*

I nodded quietly.

The Call Girl Plan

Rosy came in. "Sir, Loveleen madam on the phone."

Kumar picked it up and spoke. When I returned from the bathroom, I saw the phone book—open to a list of call girls in Delhi.

I gently laid my head on his shoulder and asked, *"Why are you looking at this?"*

"To verify Guru's true character," he said.

I asked, *"And if he's the kind of man you suspect?"*

"Then he'll use her—to impress clients or for some shady business."

He paused and added, *"Let's sleep. We have a big day tomorrow."*

Chapter 7

Unveiling Secrets at Juhu

It was around 10 a.m. when the receptionist informed me, “Madam, there's a call for you.” Thinking it might be from a client, I asked her to connect it.

A man's voice came through. “Madam, I have some important information about Kumar sir.”

“Tell me,” I replied, slightly cautious.

“Come to Juhu Beach. There's an ice cream parlour near the entrance. Ask for Ramesh. I'll show you the real face of Kumar sir.”

I was stunned. Curiosity mixed with a surge of unease.

I drove to Juhu Beach, parked, and looked for the shop. Most were closed, but one ice cream parlour was open. I stepped inside.

“Are you Ramesh?” I asked.

He nodded. “Are you Nandini madam?”

I confirmed, and he silently handed me an envelope. Inside were photographs—images from Kumar's parties. I had seen such scenes before. He always said parties were “a necessary evil.” But there was more. Notes about his past, his relationships in Dehradun—information that

only someone very close or very observant could have collected.

Confrontation and Suspicions

I returned home, not furious about the content but infuriated by the intent. Someone wanted to hurt me through him.

I sat beside Kumar, visibly tense. He noticed immediately. "What happened?"

"There's an enemy around," I said coldly.

"What do you mean?"

"I got a call at work. Someone told me they'd show me the 'real' Kumar. I went to Juhu Beach, met a man at an ice cream parlour, and he gave me photos of your parties and information about your past—your relationships."

He didn't flinch.

I continued, "I already knew all of it. But if I didn't, I might have walked out on you."

Kumar paused, thoughtful. "Someone is trying to break us apart."

"Exactly."

"Well," he said calmly, "now that they've seen it didn't work, they may stop trying."

I asked the inevitable, “Who would want to do this?”

He didn’t answer immediately. “Go have lunch, Nandini. I’ll wait here.”

Meeting the Politician

A knock on the door interrupted us. It was Loveleen’s watchman.

“Sir, Madam wants you to meet her father. He’s just arrived from Delhi.”

Kumar nodded and told me, “I’m heading to Loveleen’s to meet her father.”

I let him go and used the time to visit the beauty parlour. I returned home three hours later, refreshed.

Birthday Celebration and Unexpected Moments

That evening, the staff party began behind our office. Kumar cut the cake and personally thanked everyone. After a short while, we moved to the main party area behind our bungalow.

As guests arrived, Kumar and I welcomed them—families at the tables, individuals at the bar. Then Loveleen arrived with her father. She gave

Kumar a kiss on the cheek, wishing him a happy birthday.

I felt a spark of anger. We had just met her—and she was already this familiar?

Soon after, Mahira introduced a couple: Kirit Trivedi and Nishitha Patel. Kirit worked at a CA firm, and Nishitha was undecided about her career path.

Kumar, ever the networker, introduced Nishitha to Loveleen, suggesting she might suit her firm. “She and Sahithi worked under you in a different timeline,” he told Loveleen. She seemed intrigued.

Later, as guests began leaving, I found Kumar sitting with a drink, visibly exhausted. Loveleen joined him at the table. I stepped away.

After dinner, I told him, “Come inside, they’re wrapping up.”

He said goodbye to Loveleen, came inside, changed, and sat on the bed.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Work has kept me away from you.”

I smiled. “It’s not just you. I’m exhausted most nights too.”

“Let’s take a vacation.”

“I’d love that.”

Doubts and Trust

In the early hours of the next morning, I felt a soft kiss and Kumar's voice, "I'm going to Loveleen's. I'll be back soon."

Half-asleep, I nodded.

Later, I woke up and realized he hadn't returned. My mind spiraled into doubt. Was he getting too close to Loveleen?

But then again, I knew his vision. He believed Loveleen was the key to expanding the business across India. He had ideas for a nationwide network using telephone modems, long before others had even heard of such a thing. He predicted the rise of the internet, mobile phones, cable TV—years in advance.

He was a man ahead of his time, and he needed the right allies. Maybe Loveleen's political connections would be crucial.

Reality and Resentment

Kumar eventually returned. I asked, "Was the meeting with her or her father?"

"Her father. He approved the next phase of our operation."

He said he was sorry again for being distant. Was it genuine tiredness or something else?

I changed the subject. “What would you like for lunch?”

“Anything. I’ll be in the study preparing notes for a consortium meeting.”

“A consortium?”

“Yes. We’re trying to bring together major companies to fund and implement our future technologies.”

Ambitious as always.

Reflections on Love, Jealousy, and Legacy

One of the girls we had saved from Dolly’s gang now worked in our home out of gratitude. Kumar had offered her an office role, but she preferred to stay here. Kumar did a lot of good—but his connection with Loveleen still made me uneasy.

I thought back to how he used his charm in business—like with Anjali, a client’s daughter, years ago. Did he now charm Loveleen to win her support?

At lunch, I changed into something appropriate to visit his family. I packed gifts for Leena and we headed to Wadala. His mother opened the door, surprised.

“I was just about to call you,” she said. “Leena has matured.”

We stayed for a while. Kumar gave money to his mother for the function and told her to keep us informed of the date. Then we returned home.

A Moment of Concern

Back at home, the watchman said, "Loveleen madam asked for you."

Kumar went to her house again. Two hours later, he returned—drunk.

I had never seen him like that. He slumped on the sofa. I spoon-fed him and let him sleep there.

The next morning, he awoke with a hangover. I gave him aspirin and coffee.

"What was the need to drink so much?"

"We were discussing politics... I didn't realize how much I drank."

"Get ready. We have projects to review."

"Alright," he said and headed for the bathroom.

Final Observations

We spent the day in meetings. Work consumed us, but my thoughts kept returning to Loveleen. I didn't understand her role in his life. Was she just a stepping stone for business—or something more?

I watched him as he worked—driven, brilliant, caring. And even if his past held shadows, his present was dedicated to our future.

I just hoped I'd continue to be a part of it.

Tensions, Doubts & Ambitions: A Turning Point

After a week, Kumar left for Delhi with Loveleen. Two days later, he called me and revealed details about Guru and Dimple—how they used a doppelgänger to impersonate Loveleen and how Guru, deceived by the act, invited her to a Saturday party. "It'll take time to complete this operation," he said, "hang in there."

"I'll try to come to Delhi for a short while," I told him.

"I miss you," he replied. "If you can take a break from work, come over. I've got a place for myself here."

A place for himself? I wondered. *When Loveleen is there, how can he say he's alone?* Maybe he meant they weren't staying together.

"I'll see if I can get away," I replied.

"Please do," he said before ending the call.

The next day, he called again and said he might find a lead once he printed the party photos.

An Unexpected Call from Godrej

The following morning, Mr. Godrej's PA called me.

"Where's Kumar?" he asked.

"He's in Delhi on business," I replied.

The PA passed the phone to Mr. Godrej, who said firmly, "Please tell Kumar to return to Bombay immediately. We have a consortium meeting at 11:30 tomorrow."

I immediately rang Kumar.

He answered, "Tell me."

I conveyed the urgency, "Mr. Godrej wants you back in Bombay tonight, or by the first flight tomorrow at the latest."

"What's so urgent?" he asked.

"No idea," I said, "but it sounded serious."

Just before hanging up, I thought I heard a woman's voice in the background—was it Loveleen? Or was my imagination running wild?

Kumar Returns to Bombay

That night, Kumar returned home. Seeing me cooking, he smiled and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I wanted to prepare your dinner myself. I asked the maid to prep the vegetables and sent her home."

He kissed me gently on the neck and said, "I'll freshen up before dinner."

After dinner, he sat down on the sofa and lit a cigarette. I joined him.

He snubbed out the fag. "You could've finished that," I said.

"It doesn't matter," he replied, distracted.

"How was the meeting?"

"Successful. We secured an order to install servers—one here, and one in Delhi."

"So now you can clear your modem stock," I said.

"I ordered a hundred more," he replied. "We'll sell subscriptions for server access and data transfers. The income will go into a designated fund, so no one can accuse us of misuse."

"And your profit?"

"We'll dominate India's data transmission services before the internet boom. It'll give us a huge lead in future ventures."

He went silent, deep in thought.

"Let's go to bed," I said softly.

A Night to Remember

He followed me, and when I turned around, he was already on the bed, aroused.

“Thinking of our night together did this,” he said playfully.

I joined him, and he made love to me with the same passion as our first night. Afterward, breathless and content, I whispered, “That was the best night of my life.”

“Mine too,” he said, holding me.

The Shift in His Focus

After returning from Delhi, something in him had changed. He was restless, talking about shifting the factory to Bhandup for more space.

Why the sudden change? Had something happened in Delhi that made him this decisive?

Did he and Loveleen get too close? She didn’t seem the type, but men are unpredictable, and women even more so. Still, he kept insisting it was all business. Perhaps it really was.

Back to Business

At the office, I noticed some photos on his table and picked them up.

“What are these?” I asked.

“Photos from last Saturday’s party,” he said. He pointed, “That’s Sonia, Loveleen’s double. And this is Dimple—the one I sent to unmask Guru.”

“The resemblance is scary,” I said.

“We hired a makeup artist from Bombay to perfect it.”

“He did a good job,” I agreed. “But what now?”

“That’s the problem. I’m unsure who to target next. I need to discuss with Loveleen.”

“Let’s go then.”

“You want to come?” he asked, surprised.

“Yes, I want to be part of this.”

“I need a bath first. It’s been a long day shifting factory stuff. Maybe later.”

“Fine,” I said, teasing. “Then let’s go home and I’ll get you a whiskey.”

He smiled, took my hand, and we walked home together.

An Unexpected Encounter

That Saturday, Kumar was invited to another party via Loveleen. I had to fly to Hyderabad for

my cousin Rohan's engagement and had a client meeting before that. I left that evening.

But before leaving, I saw Loveleen in our room, her hand on Kumar's shoulder.

I didn't stop to ask questions.

A Confrontation and Clarity

After my trip, I found Kumar back at home.

Without waiting, I pulled him into the garden.

"What are you doing with Loveleen?" I asked, trying to control my anger.

"What did I do?"

"What was she doing in our room last Saturday?"

"She came to pick me up for the party. You weren't coming."

"But her hands were on your shoulder!"

He thought for a moment. "I was adjusting my tie. She handed me my coat and must've brushed something off my shoulder. That's it."

"So she's like family now?" I snapped.

"She's a friend," he said calmly.

"A *girlfriend*?"

“Well,” he said with a smirk, “she’s a girl, and she’s my friend...”

I burst into laughter. I couldn’t stay mad.

“You called me so many times,” he said. “Why didn’t you respond?”

“Our friends planned a tour,” I admitted. “I was busy.”

“I didn’t know you’d come,” I added, “or I’d have cancelled everything.”

To make it up, I took him to my room and we made love. Afterward, I got dressed and said, “You decide when to go back. I’m heading out.”

Girls' Night Out & Confessions

That evening, during a night out with my college friends, they asked about my husband.

“He’s in computers,” I said casually. “Software and hardware.”

“How much is the business worth?” Karishma asked.

“I didn’t invest a rupee, and my share is already worth ₹1 crore,” I replied.

“In just two years?” she asked, stunned.

“Yes,” I said with pride. “His name’s Kumar.”

They asked more questions. I told them we met at his sister's wedding, that our parents were friends, and that I fell for him at first sight. I gave them a polished version of events, skipping over the more intimate details.

They were all impressed—and a little envious.

Reflection

Was I ashamed of him? No.

But I knew my old classmates would recognise him from Dehradun. And some of them might want to “throw their paws” into him. So I planned to keep him away from the wedding—not out of shame, but out of protectiveness.

They called him a “₹3 crore fish.”

I just smiled.

My cab arrived, and I gathered my friends to go home.

A Prank, A Party, and the Return of the Real Husband

A Surprise Visitor

I woke up and came downstairs to find **Praveen** sitting in the hall. He works as a software engineer in the U.S.

"When did you come to Hyderabad?" I asked.

"Early this morning," he replied.

"You landed today and came straight here?" I was surprised.

"I wanted to see you. I missed your wedding. Congratulations! Where's your husband?"

"He's in Bombay," I said casually.

"In Bombay? What's he doing there—running another hospital?" he joked.

"No, actually, he runs a software firm—and a computer assembly business too."

"Wow! Our country really is moving ahead," Praveen said, visibly impressed.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"I came early for Rahul's wedding. Also, my mother's been looking for matches for me, so she wanted me to come sooner."

I looked him over and said, "Will you do me a favour?"

"For you? Anything," he said.

"You have to act as my husband in front of my friends."

"What? Your husband?" he asked, shocked.

“Yes. My friends are dying to meet him. He’s busy with work—shifting factories and setting up a tech coalition with the likes of Tata, Birla, and Godrej. They won’t stop pestering me. I just need you to play along for a few minutes, then say you have some work and leave.”

He hesitated. “What have you told them about him?”

“That he owns a software company worth ₹2 crores and I own a ₹1 crore share in it. I don’t even know the worth of his hardware business.”

He leapt from his seat. “Your share is a crore?! What’s he doing—robbing banks and funnelling the money into his company?”

“Before he started the company, he sold a piece of software for ₹50 lakhs,” I added.

Now Praveen’s jaw dropped. “You’re from the software world. Why so surprised?”

“Now I know how software firms pay such high salaries in the U.S.!”

“So, will you help me or not?”

“For a few minutes of being a crorepati and your ‘pathi’? Absolutely.”

“I’ll call you in the evening,” I said.

“Great. I’ll go home and come back—just call me,” he said, and left.

A Party to Remember

An hour later, Karishma called.

"Are you coming to the party tonight?" she asked.

"Kumar just came from Bombay. How can I leave him alone?" I lied.

"Bring him to the party then!"

"Where is it?"

"At my friend's farmhouse—close to your house."

"Alright, I'll ask him if he's up for it."

"Bring him at *whatever cost*," she insisted.

I called Praveen and told him about the plan.

"Just remember, your name is Kumar tonight."

"I'll say I'm Praveen Kumar. That'll make it easier."

"Fine by me."

That evening, I introduced him as Kumar at the party. Some of the girls looked disappointed—they clearly wasn't the Kumar from Dehradun they were expecting. If I had brought the real Kumar, who knows how they would've reacted.

But now, *Praveen* seemed smitten with Karishma.

“She’s looking at me,” he whispered excitedly.

I looked over—Karishma did smile, but who knows what that meant. Regardless, Praveen insisted I introduce him to everyone. To give him a chance to interact, I stepped away under the pretext of an emergency call from the hospital.

Truth Comes Out

An hour later, I returned. Praveen rushed over.

“Come with me,” he said urgently and pulled me aside.

“Karishma knows who I really am. She recognized me from a photo her mom showed her. So, I told her the truth.”

“It’s fine,” I said. “I’ll tell them it was just a prank. No big deal.”

Back inside, Karishma approached me.

“So, when are you introducing me to your *real* husband?”

“At Rohan’s wedding,” I promised. “This was just a prank.”

“I figured as much. But what’s this I heard from Praveen about a Railway software project?”

“No idea,” I replied honestly.

She continued, "It's not public yet. Praveen's father called to ask about it, and Praveen said he didn't know. What's this software he developed?"

"You know about the ₹50 lakh software, right?" I said, lowering my voice. "He claims he got the idea from the *future*."

Karishma looked at me, stunned. "What?"

"He says the knowledge comes to him in dreams. He developed our hospital software in a month—without even consulting me or opening a book."

She looked at me as though I were telling a fairy tale.

"You can ask him yourself at the wedding," I said. "He'll even tell you what future gadgets are coming."

Kumar's Return

Kumar called from the airport—he'd be landing in two hours.

I had to meet him and also brief him on what to expect at the wedding. Especially about *Karishma*, who might try to stir things up—now that her match with Praveen was being considered.

At the airport, I waited until he emerged with his luggage. He had changed his hairstyle and looked more polished than ever. With each step up the social ladder, he was evolving. *Was Loveleen behind this transformation?* I wondered.

When he spotted me, I hugged him. His eyes said, *"If you missed me so much, why didn't you call?"* I could read his mind.

We went home, and I took him to my room.

"Get some rest," I said. "We'll talk later."

An hour later, I returned.

He put aside the document he'd been reviewing and looked at me. "Do you know how long I've waited to see you?"

"It's just been a week," I said.

"That week felt like a year."

"Don't be dramatic."

"Come here," he said softly.

"I'll change and come."

I put on a negligee and returned.

"When did you get that?" he asked, smiling.

"I've had it for a while."

I stood before him.

"You bring out the best in me," he whispered.

A Wedding, A Visionary, and an Unexpected Past

Early Morning Preparations

I woke Kumar early in the morning.

He blinked at me groggily, "What?"

"We have to go to Rahul's house."

"Isn't the wedding tomorrow?"

"Yes, but there are other ceremonies today."

"Alright, I'm coming," he said and went to freshen up.

By the time he returned from his bath, I had prepared a cup of coffee and placed it on the table.

As he sipped it, he asked, "What should I wear?"

"Just go in casuals," I replied.

We got dressed and headed to Rahul's house, where the pre-wedding rituals were underway. The women were performing a haldi ceremony—applying turmeric, bathing the groom, and adorning him with a bindi and a protective black dot on the cheek.

Later, Rahul came over and Kumar shook his hand. "Congratulations."

"This is the first time we've met since your wedding," Rahul said.

"I did come to your house and the hospital, but you were always busy," Kumar replied.

Rahul smiled. "Nandini told me about the Railway Ministry meeting."

"We've submitted the proposal. Let's see where it goes," Kumar said.

As more people arrived, I began introducing them to Kumar—starting with Praveen and his sister Neeta.

"I've heard a lot about you," Praveen said, extending his hand. "Nice to finally meet you."

"You weren't at the wedding?" Kumar asked.

"I was in the U.S.," Praveen replied. "Couldn't make it."

"What do you do there?"

"I'm a software engineer."

"Good salary, I suppose."

"Not like yours here," Praveen said with a laugh.

Kumar grinned. "To get here, I had to hustle hard and manipulate a few opportunities."

The Visionary's Journey

“What kind of hustle?” Praveen asked, curious.

“I started out doing deliveries during college. Later, I joined a courier company as a delivery boy and got promoted to Marketing Executive. I began doing data entry, got an idea for data transfer, and developed software for it. They implemented it across all branches in India, even sent me to the U.S. for training. But they didn’t credit me—so I patented it. They had no choice but to pay.”

“Is this the software the Railways are now evaluating?” Praveen asked.

Kumar raised an eyebrow. “How do you know that? Did Nandini tell you?”

“No. My father told me. He wanted *me* to develop that software. I had no idea how to start, and he scolded me—‘If an Indian developed it, why can’t you?’”

“So how did you come up with the idea?” he asked.

“I read it in a book about the future,” Kumar said nonchalantly.

“You read a book from the future?”

“Well, technically, the knowledge was passed to me in dreams by my future self.”

I jumped in, “He developed our hospital software entirely from memory—without consulting

books, without even asking me anything until the very end.”

“You know what’s crazy?” I continued, “His daughter Leena is a time traveler.”

Praveen stared at me. “Time traveler?”

I nodded. “He had a one-night stand with Sahithi. She became pregnant. During a traumatic incident, she ended up traveling into the future, met a man who looked like Kumar, gave birth, and then returned with no memory of those hours. Leena returned later, already seven years old.”

“Where is she now?”

“She’s with Kumar’s parents. They arrived this morning and went to his sister’s place. I’ve sent a car to bring them here.”

Praveen, now entirely intrigued, said, “I want to work with you.”

“You’re welcome,” Kumar said. “We need good developers.”

I teased, “I thought you’d say it’s all top secret.”

“Nothing stays secret anymore,” Kumar said. “In the future, there’ll be cameras everywhere—watching your every move.”

“In the bedroom too?” I joked.

“Some people install them there. A few scandals too.”

Praveen chuckled. “Maybe I’ll wait a bit. Karishma’s considering a move to the U.S., and there’s talk about our match.”

Technology, Friends & The Future

Rahul’s mother walked up. “Did you eat anything?”

Kumar shook his head. “No, not yet.”

She gave me a mock scolding, “Take care of your husband!”

“I got caught up in their conversation,” I said. “I’ll bring breakfast. Anyone else?”

Rahul raised his hand. “Me too—I haven’t even had coffee!”

I brought their plates. As they ate, they continued chatting.

“These ceremonies are brutal,” Kumar said.

Rahul leaned in, “I heard Nandini hasn’t left your side since meeting you. Scared someone will steal you?”

Kumar smiled. “I was buried in work. She was the one taking care of me.”

“Is that why you married her?” Rahul asked.

"No. I was in a dark place when I met her. She understood me—supported me. She knows my past. I know my future. We clicked because of that."

Enter the Old Friends

Later, my college friends arrived—Karishma, Lakshmi, Twinkle, and Narmada. Lakshmi gazed at Kumar with admiration. Twinkle and Narmada were polite. Karishma, of course, looked mischievous.

"I feel like I've seen you somewhere," she said to Kumar.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"Vijayawada."

"Then maybe you saw me making deliveries there during my degree years."

"You did deliveries in Vijayawada?"

"For three years."

Then it struck her.

"You must've known Sunitha."

"She was my girlfriend."

"Was?"

“She disappeared after a plane crash. Air hostess.”

To steer the conversation away, he began narrating how he later found her alive.

Twinkle asked about the business. Lakshmi was curious about how we made our money.

Then lunch was called. We sat on mats with banana leaves. Kumar sat with Karishma and Twinkle, Praveen beside Karishma.

Twinkle cheekily tried to steal Kumar’s sweet, and he playfully dropped it back on her leaf. We returned to the veranda after eating.

Predicting the Future

Karishma asked, “What about the future of television?”

“There’ll be hundreds of channels, everything in colour, giant screens like home theatres. Mobile phones will fit in your hand. You can speak to anyone from anywhere. No STD codes. Reservations for trains and buses will be done from home.”

He continued, “There’ll be 3D movies. The internet will let you access global information instantly. There will be a search engine—Google—that connects everything. No more

letters—people will use email. Even wedding invites will be sent online.”

Twinkle asked, “How are *you* doing all this?”

“We formed a consortium—Tata, Birla, Godrej, Reliance—working with government licenses. The Railways project will be our first major breakthrough.”

Praveen asked, “Can’t they just call the station for bookings?”

“They tried. Too many mistakes. Our system generates the documents—no room for errors.”

Lakshmi asked, “So you’re not taking this project directly?”

“No, the consortium will handle it. I’ll earn through hardware sales and software royalties.”

“Maybe one day, kids will read about you in history books,” she said with wonder.

A Ghost from the Past

A new voice interrupted. “What projects are you doing on your own?”

It was *Monica*. She hadn’t joined us for lunch.

Kumar looked at her curiously.

“I’m Monica—Nandini’s friend,” she said, and then asked, “Can we speak privately?”

Before he could reply, Rohan's mother called me, and I went inside.

A Vanishing Act

When I returned with tea for Kumar, he was gone.

"Praveen, where's Kumar?"

"Monica took him outside—she said she wanted to speak privately. I thought it might be about investment. Her father left her a huge business empire."

My heart dropped.

Monica... Dehradun...

I rushed outside and asked our driver, "Did you see Kumar?"

"The other madam took him in her car," he said.

I stood there stunned.

Now what is she going to do to him?

Kumar's New Venture, Monica's Proposal & A Test of Trust

Business, Boundaries & Bonds

Kumar and Monica returned after two hours.

Praveen asked, "Where did you go off to?"

Kumar replied briefly, "We were discussing business," offering no further explanation.

I took Kumar aside and asked, "What did she want?"

"She's looking to invest. I shared an idea for manufacturing electronic components. If she's seriously interested, I'll reach out to my contact. They want me to start a unit in India."

"How much investment are we talking?"

"It's a capital-intensive process. I'll have to check with them before giving an estimate."

"Did she agree?"

"I gave her some time to think it over. Even if she says no, we might still need to start small."

"If she declines, let me know—I'll try to help raise some capital."

"I'll just step out for a minute," he said, lighting a cigarette outside. Praveen joined him.

"If you're looking for investors, I'd like to contribute," Praveen said.

"Did Nandini ask you to say this?" Kumar asked.

"No, it's my idea. I've saved some money and could borrow from my father. I'll repay it from my future savings."

“We’ll see how this goes. The kit manufacturer is based in the U.S., with production units in China and Thailand. They’re scouting for alternate locations—and like China, we have low labour costs. If we can manage without paying high rent, we could shift our assembly to a new facility.”

He paused, thinking aloud, “A factory near Vizag would be ideal—access to a port, raw materials, and potential industrial land. We just need to check if Monica owns land nearby. Tonight, I’ll call the manufacturers and discuss next steps.”

Clearing the Air with Monica

Later, I took Monica aside.

“What’s your idea of whisking my husband away like that?”

Monica responded calmly, “You know how relatives are—they bring useless proposals and want to use my money. I wanted advice on investing. I found Kumar honest. He even refused my investment, saying his ventures are futuristic with uncertain timelines.”

She continued, “When I told him I’d bear the losses and only share the profits, he mentioned a potential plan for manufacturing components for his assemblies. He said it was capital-intensive and gave me time to decide.”

“And for that, you had to take him to your farmhouse?”

She smirked. “Honestly, I had a different idea. But he refused. He said, *‘As long as Nandini is with me, I won’t touch another woman.’* Maybe not in those exact words, but that was the meaning.”

“He said that?”

She nodded. “He told me how you supported him during his lowest phase. He said this is the longest you’ve been away from him, and he’s feeling the void.”

I scanned her face for signs of mischief, but she seemed genuine.

“What if others want to invest?”

“I’d welcome it—it reduces my risk.”

“That would reduce your control too.”

“I don’t want to be hands-on. I’d prefer more advisers in the project.”

She appeared sincere. I’d keep watching—but for now, I was reassured.

A Late-Night Call & Some Resentment

Around 9 PM, Kumar asked, “Nandini, where can I make an ISD call?”

“We don’t have an ISD line at home. You’ll need to go to the STD booth at the centre.”

“I’ll make the call and come back.”

Praveen offered to go with him for a walk.

They returned later, and Kumar asked, “Where are we sleeping tonight?”

“They’ve arranged mats in the hall.”

“Okay,” he said quietly and walked to the veranda.

He seemed disappointed. Maybe he was missing our time together. But with early morning functions, we had to stay. Let him stew for a night—it would pass.

Wedding Ceremonies & Final Rituals

Early next morning, I woke Kumar and asked him to get ready. When he returned from his bath, I handed him traditional wear.

Seeing Praveen helping him dress, I went to oversee the ceremonies.

After the wedding lunch, relatives began to leave. I noticed Kumar chatting with his family.

As per custom, we accompanied the bride and groom to Rahul’s house. I handed Kumar a cup of

tea and said, “Garbadhanam Muhuratam is fixed for 9 PM. After that, we’ll return home.”

He nodded. “I haven’t seen Monica—didn’t she attend?”

“She was here briefly. Then she left.”

At 9 PM, the ritual began. The bride handed coconuts to married women before being escorted to the groom’s room.

I sat beside Kumar and said, “My work here is done. Shall we leave?”

“On the way, I need to make another call to the U.S.”

“Okay.”

We packed up, loaded the car, and drove off. He stopped at the STD booth, made his call, and we returned home.

A Quiet Moment at Home

Once home, Kumar bathed and sat on the bed. I joined him after my own bath.

“What are you thinking about?” I asked.

“How much funding will the new factory need?”

“Ten to twenty crores? Don’t worry—we’ll arrange it.”

"I'm not worried about the amount. I've never used outside capital before—this would be the first time."

"But you were ready to use Loveleen's money."

"That's different. Loveleen is part of our destiny. She's like family."

His words struck me. "What are you saying?"

"In the future I read about, she lived with us. Her son Dhruv called me daddy, alongside Sneha's children. Her husband, Guru, was killed, and she invested her inheritance in our ventures. She began investing even before her husband died—discreetly using her father's black money."

He continued, "She gave him the bungalow we're now using as an office. Her father got elected CM shortly after. They lived together in a different bungalow. Later, he rented out two others to movie productions."

"So, that's why you tried to rent our office building too—when it didn't work, you turned it into the factory."

He nodded. "In his timeline, he started the software firm in 1991. We started ours in 1987—we're four years ahead."

"You're trying to use that advantage."

"Yes. I'm returning to Bombay tomorrow. Will you come?"

"I need a week here to wrap up things."

"Fair enough."

"You seem to miss me," I said, kissing him.

He smiled. "Sorry, I've been distracted."

A Surprise Lunch Party

Later, I took Kumar to lunch. As we entered the restaurant, he was surprised to see all my friends—including **Monica and Pranitha**—already there.

Pranitha rushed up and hugged him. "It's been so long!"

"I didn't know you were here."

"I'm throwing a pre-wedding party. Nandini brought you as my gift."

He smiled. "Ask me anything."

"Nothing, just your presence is enough."

Pranitha brought him a light beer and sat beside him.

"I heard you're starting a factory?"

"News travels fast," he said.

"Monica is my sister. She told me."

"I've received documents from the U.S. I'll review them in Bombay, then share the plans with our consortium."

"What's this consortium?"

"A group of top Indian business houses—Tata, Birla, Reliance, Godrej. Together, we decide on future-shaping projects like mobile telephony, broadband, AI, etc."

"Is it wise to route everything through them?"

"These products will shape India's future. We aim to stay ahead—even beyond the U.S."

"If you're going forward with the factory, I'd like to invest."

"How much are you thinking?"

"That depends on the project cost."

"I'll calculate it after checking the documents. We'll import equipment from the U.S., negotiate import duties, and see how much we need. What's your minimum and maximum investment range?"

Monica added, "Give us a ballpark estimate, and we'll decide our shares together."

"That works. I'll get back to you after reviewing the files."

We toasted to the future.

Afterward, Kumar left for his sister's place to meet his parents and Leena.



The R&D Centre, a Mysterious Time Shift & a New Mission

The New Investment Proposal

Kumar informed me that he had secured funding for the factory from Bob. Additionally, Bob proposed a new opportunity for us to invest in a research project—possibly related to electronics.

Later that day, I met my friends at our usual hotel and shared what Kumar had said. I told them:

“If any of you are keen to invest, Kumar is planning to start an R&D centre in Andhra. The returns will be strong, but it may take longer than the factory to generate income. Once research concludes, we can expect significant revenue through royalties.”

Lakshmi asked, “Is it something like the software Kumar sold for ₹50 lakhs?”

“Somewhat, but that was software. This will focus on hardware. If it works, even the U.S. might turn to us for products. It could revolutionize our tech landscape. Kumar doesn't want to pressure anyone—he has the capital—

but since it was your idea to invest, he's offering you first preference."

Monica asked, "How much is he expecting?"

"There's no fixed minimum or maximum. Based on your investment, he'll issue shares. Dividends will only be paid once there's surplus income."

Pranitha asked, "What kind of research will the centre conduct?"

"It'll likely be electronics, but the exact projects will be decided once the research head arrives."

Monica: "Is there a research head?"

"Yes. Kumar said Bob will appoint one."

Lakshmi asked, "Who's Bob?"

"He's the one who funded the factory, covered import duties, and ordered the equipment."

Karishma added, "And who *is* Bob, really?"

"He introduced Kumar to software. And when Joy's friend was killed, Bob quietly resolved the matter."

Monica suggested, "We'll wait to speak with the research head before deciding."

"That's a good plan. But keep your investments ready—Kumar may want to start immediately."

Twinkle said, "Let's go on a short trip. I suggest Araku Valley—it's beautiful this time of year."

The group nodded enthusiastically. I wondered if I should join them. I'd promised Kumar I'd return to Bombay in a week, and he would miss me. But perhaps the distance would make our bond stronger. I decided not to tell him. If he thought I was working, he wouldn't be too upset.

"Okay, count me in."

We arranged our tickets to Vizag. From there, we'd take the scenic morning train to Araku.

Interrupted Journey & Time Travel Shock

As the train started to move, it suddenly came to a halt. A guard and a plainclothes official boarded and asked us to disembark.

Confused, I asked, "Why can't we continue?"

The official said, "You've been called back urgently. Please follow me."

He took us to a phone booth and asked me to call Kumar.

I dialed. "Kumar, what's the emergency? They stopped the train and asked me to call you."

He replied, "The police are here. They want to know your whereabouts. Please speak with the inspector."

After the call, Kumar said, "Cancel your trip and return home. I'll explain everything."

“What happened?”

“What’s today’s date?”

“27th.”

“No—it’s the 29th.”

“What? That’s not possible!”

“Exactly. You need to return. We’ll talk.”

Shaken, I booked a flight to Bombay and called Kumar again. He agreed to pick me up from the airport.

The Shocking Revelation

On the way back, I asked, “What happened? Why did you stop our trip?”

Kumar asked, “Where were you going?”

“Araku.”

“Did you board the train?”

“Yes.”

“Then what happened?”

“Someone stopped the train, showed some ID, and asked us to disembark. Then we were told to call you.”

“Do you know what happened next?”

“No.”

"You reached Araku. You checked into tree-top huts at Padmavathi Gardens. Then... you all disappeared. Either kidnapped or presumed dead."

"What? But I don't remember anything like that!"

"That's because you were pulled back in time. Bob went three days into the past to stop your journey. He intercepted the train, brought you back to our timeline, and had you call me. Otherwise, the police would've taken me to Andhra for questioning."

"Questioning you? Why?"

"They thought I took investors' money and made all of you disappear."

"So, I time-traveled?"

"Yes. After Leena and Sahithi, you're the next person to travel through time."

I was stunned. I felt no sensation, no transition—just confusion. But the facts were undeniable.

We reached home around 10:30 PM.

"I had dinner on the flight."

"I already ate. Come, let's sleep."

"You didn't miss me on the trip?"

"I did. I was just hurt you didn't tell me."

“I’m sorry. I made a mistake.”

“It’s okay. Come here.”

Confronting Praveen

The next morning, I called Praveen.

It turned out **he** had filed the police complaint. He’d asked Karishma to call him daily, and when she didn’t for two days, he panicked.

But why would he suspect Kumar? Kumar had specifically said he wasn’t accepting investments at this stage. Clearly, there was a miscommunication.

Still, I was **grateful to Kumar**. He had once again protected me—and all of us. I vowed to never take him for granted again.

The Arrival of Bob & Dimitri

The doorbell rang. Two men stood outside.

“Hi, I’m Bob. Is Kumar here?” the older man said.

“Come in. Are you the Research Head Kumar mentioned?”

Bob gestured to the other man, “This is Dimitri Ivanchev. You can call him Dimitri.”

“Please come in. Kumar will be here in a minute.”

I called Kumar, and once introductions were done, Bob said, "Discuss the R&D centre details with Dimitri," and excused himself.

Unexpected Turn: From Electronics to Viruses

I asked Dimitri, "What will be the requirements for the centre?"

"We'll need about 10 acres of land."

"That can be arranged in Andhra."

"Great. We'll build labs, install equipment, and recruit researchers."

"What exactly will you research?"

"Viruses. Vaccines. Anti-viral medicines."

I froze.

"Wait. Kumar told me the research would focus on electronics."

"I know nothing about electronics. I'm a microbiologist. Bob brought me here to study new viruses entering Earth's atmosphere."

"From space?"

"Yes. A meteorite fell in India. It was kept under wraps. All the villagers nearby died from an unknown virus. The area is sealed off."

"That's terrifying."

“We have a mobile lab to collect samples. Once you confirm the land, I’ll begin construction.”

“We should visit and inspect the site.”

“Agreed. I’ll call Bob to arrange a charter flight.”

I looked at Kumar. “Should you come with us?”

“I have a consortium meeting. You know the land; ask Monica for help.”

“She’s in Vizag. I’ll call her and ask her to meet us at the airport.”

“Good. Do that.”



Setting up the R&D Lab: Mysteries, Motives, and Memories

Exploring the Meteorite Crash Site

We were en route to the site where the meteorite had reportedly crashed. Protective suits were arranged for everyone in the van. When I told the gang that we were establishing an R&D centre for virology, they were hesitant.

“We’ve never heard of anything like this,” they said.

I responded, “If you don’t want to invest, that’s fine. But at least allow me to use 10 acres of land

near Vizag. We'll handle the construction—maybe Kumar or Bob will arrange funding.”

Monica stepped up, offering the land as part of her investment. She reminded us that Kumar had only ventured into this project because of her interest and said:

“Don't worry about funding. Instead of wasting money on my relatives, I'd rather invest in something for the greater good.”

We reached the restricted zone, heavily guarded by military personnel. Dimitri and his Russian assistant showed their identification and handed over some documents. The guards asked about the people in the van, but Dimitri signalled we weren't part of the retrieval team.

Shortly after, the two returned with three body bags, helped by soldiers. After sanitising, we resumed our journey back to Vizag.

At a temporary lab, the bodies were stored for analysis. We removed our protective gear, bathed, and changed into clean clothes provided by the team.

Formalizing the R&D Centre

We visited the bank to open a lab account. Bob had already arranged documentation, and a sum

of ₹10 crores was transferred to the lab's account.

We visited the land allocated for the lab and invited my father, a construction professional, to review the building plans prepared by Dimitri's engineer.

"I'll take care of the construction costs," Dad said.

With his rapid-construction machinery, work began immediately. I updated Kumar and sent him the company registration papers.

The company's ownership was structured as follows:

- **Kumar** – 30%
- **Me** – 20%
- **Monica & Pranitha** – 14% each
- **Praveen & Karishma** – 8% each
- **Twinkle & Lakshmi** – 3% each

This was my way of repaying Kumar for giving me a 25% share in the software firm without any financial input.

The Lab Takes Shape

Construction progressed rapidly. The lab was a single-storey structure covering two acres, with the rest of the land reserved as a safety buffer.

Dimitri suggested fencing the entire property with “DANGER – DO NOT ENTER” signs. He later proposed installing perimeter alarms.

The lab equipment arrived and was being installed. In two weeks, we expected the lab to be operational. My duties had kept me away from Kumar for longer than I anticipated. Now, with the lab nearing completion, I could plan a short trip to Bombay for the inauguration of Kumar’s electronics factory.

A Brief Reunion with Kumar

I updated Kumar: “The lab building is almost ready. Dimitri is importing the equipment from Russia.”

At the factory, Leena broke a coconut during the inauguration. She’s grown quickly—almost as tall as me.

Kumar sent his parents and Leena home while I rode with him and Loveleen. She sat beside me in the backseat. Kumar, seated up front, was absorbed in documents. He’s become increasingly busy, especially with the consortium’s efforts to bring the internet to India. I heard they’ve rented a transponder on

INSAT 1C and aim to connect to U.S. internet satellites.

Loveleen seems to have assumed many of my responsibilities in the company. She even handed over her own firm to Nishitha so she could focus on helping Kumar.

When we dropped Loveleen off at her house, Kumar packed away his papers. At our home, Rose brought him tea as he relaxed.

"I missed you. When are you coming back?" he asked.

"After the lab's inauguration. Then I'll consider returning."

He was curious about the lab.

"Is this lab only for the current virus or is it for future threats? Do you suspect a global virus outbreak?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because of Bob. Initially, we planned a hardware manufacturing unit. But Bob provided funding and redirected us to set up a virology lab. This sudden urgency seems... intentional."

Lab Inauguration Preparations

I stayed for two days in Bombay. As we prepared for the lab's inauguration, I asked:

"Who should inaugurate the lab? The PM or CM isn't feasible."

"Maybe someone from the consortium. I'll speak with Mr Godrej."

I left for Vizag the next morning. Monica picked me up from the airport.

"Who's doing the inauguration?" she asked.

"Kumar is handling that."

"Next time, we'll arrive by helicopter. Dimitri said Bob arranged for VIP transport."

Apparently, a helipad was being constructed near the lab with help from my father.

"What's Kumar up to?" she asked.

"He's disappointed we're not doing electronics R&D, though Bob has promised to supply U.S. technology."

"He's already got his factory. What more does he want?"

"I think he misses working closely with us."

"Do you think he misses us?"

I smiled. She didn't realize I was teasing.

"What do you like most about Kumar?" I asked.

"His honesty."

That surprised me—I expected something cheekier.

“At the farmhouse, I saw honesty in his eyes. He spoke fondly about you. He was hesitant to accept my investment until I said I'd bear the losses. That's when he opened up about the electronics project.”

She shared how she had also researched viruses and spoke with Dimitri's assistant. He told her about pandemics like the Plague and even theories suggesting it may have been a deliberate population control strategy.

The Book and the Alternate Kumar

We discussed Kumar's source of futuristic knowledge.

“Kumar says Bob anticipated global health risks and started the lab to protect this region.”

“Why India?”

“Bob's operations seem India-centric. Kumar believes Bob is either from here or assigned to this region.”

Then she asked about “*Dead Kumar*.”

“Kumar received a book from another timeline—written by his alternate self. That Kumar died in

1999. The book detailed the technologies of the future and events that shaped the world.”

“How did he get the book?”

“You might not believe it, but Bob created a parallel timeline and sent Kumar’s alter ego there to replace the dead one. Since then, Kumar has received dreams and visions from that timeline.”

She was fascinated and horrified by what came next:

“In that timeline, Nandini’s husband Prathap used Sahithi to kill Kumar—out of jealousy or greed. Kumar believes she acted because she felt neglected.”

This led me to reflect: *What would I do if I felt neglected?* If Kumar ever strayed, would it be my fault too? Sometimes, wives push their husbands away unknowingly.

“What kind of woman kills her own husband?” I asked.

“I was wondering the same,” Monica replied.

Monica’s Final Thoughts

“I don’t want to sleep with him again,” Monica said. “But I cherish his memory. He’s unlike anyone I’ve ever been with. He was honest and

made sure his partner was satisfied. I invested in him because I felt safe. Even when I took him to the farmhouse to test him, he passed.”

I told her how Kumar had given me a 25% share in the company even before our marriage.

“He makes decisions from the heart, not the head.”

We reached the lab, and security opened the gate. Staff quarters were nearly complete. The building we’d stay in had full amenities—filtered water, a generator backup, and furnished rooms. Despite everything, Kumar’s honesty and Bob’s mystery continued to linger in our thoughts.



Lab Inauguration, Business Intrigues & Emotional Crossroads



Final Preparations & Equipment Installation

The equipment arrived and was being fitted in their respective labs under Dimitri's supervision. Our role was limited to making payments, as we didn't fully understand the technical aspects of the equipment. Once installations were complete, Dimitri promised to provide details and usage instructions.

We were waiting for the arrival of VIPs before officially beginning lab operations. The inauguration had to be perfectly timed.

I called Kumar and asked,

"Who will inaugurate the lab?" He replied, "The consortium spoke with the PM, who suggested the President inaugurate it. We'll schedule it sometime next week."

With the President coming, we needed to ensure the guest accommodations in the newly constructed staff quarters were ready.



Friendship with Monica Deepens

Monica and I had grown close during this time. One day, I asked,

“Why haven’t you married yet?”

She replied,

“I haven’t found anyone trustworthy. Most matches arranged by relatives were only interested in my money.”

I suggested,

“Next time they propose someone, tell them you’ve donated your wealth to a charitable trust. Let’s test how genuine their intentions are.”

“Great idea,” she smiled. “Let’s actually do it, temporarily.”



The Inauguration of the Indian Virology Lab

Kumar later called to inform me,

“We’ve decided to name the lab *The Indian Virology Lab*. The President will cut the ribbon, Leena will power up the lab, and the President will activate the first machine.”

Helicopters would ferry VIPs in stages; others could travel by road or based on preference.

Everything went smoothly. The President inaugurated the lab, and the VIPs returned to Delhi as scheduled. That evening, we hosted a celebration.

Mr. Tata approached Kumar and congratulated him.

“How did you arrange funding?” he asked.

Kumar introduced Monica and me:

“My wife’s friends invested. Monica is the main investor, and Nandini managed the project from the beginning.”

“Was this your vision?”

“It was Bob’s. I originally intended to invest in electronics, but Bob redirected our focus to this lab. He fully funded the electronics factory.”

“Wasn’t it risky? No guaranteed returns.”

“When Bob predicted an imminent viral outbreak, I diverted funds to this venture. The credit goes to my wife and her friends, not me.”

I added,

“They invested because they trust Kumar.”

Mr. Tata was then called away as the helicopter awaited.



Back to Bombay & Rekindled Romance

Kumar asked me,

“When are you coming back to Bombay?”
“Once the lab is fully functional and I’ve appointed someone in charge.”

Kumar mentioned they had a consortium meeting about the meteorite and virus situation.

Later, Dimitri moved the virus-containing bodies into the lab. After full fumigation, Dimitri told us:

“We’ve isolated the virus and are replicating it in incubators. Please avoid entering the lab.”

I asked if I could return to Bombay.

“Yes,” Dimitri replied. “Leave someone to manage our needs.”
Monica volunteered, with Lakshmi staying to assist.

I called Kumar and informed him of my return. He met me at the airport, along with Loveleen, who filled the drive home with updates on their pharma meetings.

At home, Kumar placed my luggage in the bedroom. I emerged from the bathroom in a towel and went to get dressed. Kumar hugged me from behind and kissed my cheek. We shared a quiet, emotional moment.

Later, I asked,

“Did you miss me?” “You’re always in my dreams.”

“But I missed you.” “You should. I’m your husband.”

His flirtation turned playful and passionate. We made love. Afterwards, I asked, “Is that a new technique?”

“I was taken to the Himalayas by Bob. They gave me mantras to increase stamina—partly to help with my mental overload.”

He spoke of receiving information not just from his alter ego but multiple future sources. Bob had empowered him to contain the burden of knowledge.

As he fell asleep quickly, I watched him. Was he becoming someone more than human?



Morning Conversations & Family Developments

At 6 a.m., Kumar got up and brought me coffee. I noticed he was deep in thought.

“What’s on your mind?”

“I feel like I’m urgently needed at the lab.”

He called the airport. There was an afternoon flight. He wanted to bring Loveleen too.

“Why Loveleen?” I asked.

“She’s been managing my schedule. I need to ensure everything is in order before I leave.”

I saw that in my absence, he had come to rely on her. Given his state, I didn't argue.

We discussed his brother Ram and Nishitha.

"I think they're a couple now," Kumar said. "Even my mother is asking about their marriage."

He suspected Nishitha might be pregnant. Kumar then called Loveleen and asked her to bring Nishitha over.

Confronting Pregnancy & Cultural Barriers

We went to Loveleen's house. Kumar had created a direct path between their compounds.

While we waited, I chatted with Jyothi, Loveleen's new maid, who was arranged by Krishna. I wondered if Kumar had replaced the earlier maid, thinking I had assigned her to spy.

Nishitha and Ram arrived.

Kumar hesitated, so I said,

"Kumar suspects you're pregnant."

"I missed a month," Nishitha replied, surprised.

Ram seemed caught off guard.

"I just spoke to my mom about convincing dad."

"He's still stuck on Kundalis?"

“Yes. My earlier engagement was cancelled due to astrological mismatches.”

Kumar said,

“Let him check. There won’t be a problem. Your match is made in heaven.”

Loveleen added,

“Don’t stress. If your father agrees, great. If not, we’ll look at alternatives. You need to convince your family first.”

They left after receiving instructions from Loveleen.

Reflecting on Loyalty, Bonds & Hidden Emotions

Loveleen asked,

“How did you know she might be pregnant?”
“Instinct. My mother told me to check.”

I wondered—could I notice such hormonal shifts in Loveleen?

Since Kumar’s birthday, she had become increasingly close to him. Was there a glow about her?

Joy had told me how Loveleen closed business deals and secured a major interior design

contract. Nishitha assisting her must have helped.

Kumar treated her like family. And perhaps she now felt like she belonged, not just as a business partner, but as a trusted presence.

Reflections, Jealousy & Kumar's Burdened Mind

Lingering Questions & Subtle Tensions

I keep wondering about Kumar and Loveleen's arrangement. They had supposedly cut short their previous operation due to a consortium meeting, but there hasn't been much follow-up. What exactly was their agreement regarding her father's election? Kumar once said she'd invest in his ventures if her father became CM. But now, since I've arranged the funding, he seems indifferent to her father's political success.

She still clings closely to him. Why? Is it the thrill of being involved in his growing empire? It seems she's become deeply embedded in his business activities. From what I've observed, he values her opinions, but the final decisions are always his.

That morning, they seemed to have concluded a conversation. Kumar stood and said,

"Let's go to the office."

Loveleen followed and gave him a pat on the shoulder. What did that gesture mean? Encouragement? Ownership? A subtle claim? Her seemingly innocent touches are always layered with possible meanings.

We exited through a side gate that connected her bungalow and ours—clearly made to bypass the watchman. Was it done for convenience, or to avoid scrutiny? These small details stand out more to me now, perhaps because I've been away for a while.



Business Updates & Internal Doubts

At the office, we buried ourselves in work. I tried to familiarize myself with the changes that occurred during my absence.

At 11:30, Kumar received a call—likely from Loveleen—about heading to the airport.

He stood and said,

“I’ll get ready.”

“I’ll drop you,” I offered. “So we get a little more time together.”

We went to Loveleen’s house. She had her luggage ready, and I retrieved the car. At the airport, they loaded the trolley and walked in together, chatting.

Back at the office, I checked in with Krishna about production.

"Ram is handling the production plans," he said, "I'm following his lead."

I asked to speak with Raj.

"Dispatches are smooth. Mahira went to meet clients," he reported.

Then I reviewed current projects with Joy. Surprisingly, many of them were Loveleen's ideas—or at least credited to her. I wondered briefly: Did I make a mistake allowing her to take over? But without her, we might not have expanded this quickly.

Still, I couldn't help but wonder—Why did Kumar really go to the lab?



Kumar's Distress & Future Visions

Kumar returned four days later. Even when I was right beside him, he felt distant—as though he hadn't adjusted to me being back. That night, during dinner, he barely touched his food until I fed him. His eyes looked lifeless, filled with a sorrow I'd never seen before.

"What happened?" I asked. "You looked so sad."

"I saw what happens if the virus escapes," he whispered.

He described a nightmare scenario—an earthquake exposed the cement-block-sealed meteorite, releasing the virus into the environment. And Leena—not our Leena, but the Leena from dead Kumar’s timeline—was working on the cure.

“But if Dimitri couldn’t find a cure, how could she?” I asked.

“She’s studying it for her thesis in another timeline. She has access to advanced tech and supercomputers. She sequenced the DNA and found no known match—proof it’s extraterrestrial.”

“So, if Dimitri finds a cure, she’ll know?”

“No. They’re in separate timelines. They can’t access each other’s knowledge. I seem to be the interface between them. That’s why I need to check the interface design I gave Ram.”

Kumar called his mother to ask Ram to return his call.

“I need to dump the data in my brain. Until I offload it to the computer, no new insights can enter.”

I held him close, sensing the weight on his shoulders.



A Strange Transformation

Later that night, as Kumar emerged from his bath, I noticed a change. His body was more toned, his chest broader, and there wasn't a trace of fat.

"You've grown taller," I joked.

"Maybe. My clothes are tightening."

"Have you been working out?"

"I haven't had time for that."

We made love. His energy was overwhelming, almost inhuman. Afterward, I couldn't help but wonder: How could someone change so much in two days?

Midnight Mutations & Dream Revelations

I woke in the night to hear him muttering chemical names. I gently shook him awake.

"What happened?" he asked.

"You were talking in your sleep—naming chemicals."

"I was getting the formula for the virus cure."

"Sorry for waking you."

"It's okay. You wouldn't know how much I've changed. I get dreams not just from my alter ego anymore, but from other timelines."

He described a dream involving Sneha, now old, pleading with a younger version of Kumar to find her niece—who'd vanished in Araku. They had booked a stay at Padmavathi Gardens and disappeared without a trace. Even Bob couldn't locate them.

"They went missing after the Araku train," he said. "Exactly like you almost did. That's why I contacted Bob."

"Did you ask him to save me?"

"Yes. Otherwise, I would have been arrested for your disappearance."

"Weren't you worried?"

"No. I always know where you are. And if not, I have Bob."

He smiled, but I could see the concern behind the smile. We made love again before drifting back to sleep.



The Next Morning – Doubts & Dedication

I reached over and felt an empty bed. Kumar wasn't there. At 6:30 a.m., I searched the house and wondered—Did he go to Loveleen's?

Why does he always need someone around? Is it to record his dreams? To provide emotional support when he's overwhelmed?

But I had disturbed his dream last night. Was he able to recover the chemical formula? That formula could save millions. I felt guilty.

Kumar returned with a cup of coffee in hand.

"Where were you?" I asked.

"In the office. I had to jot down the formula from my dream and send it to Dimitri for testing."

Seeing the cup in his hand, I believed him. He couldn't have gone to Loveleen's first. She's like me—a late riser. Maybe I was overthinking again.

Kumar and I had our bath, ate breakfast, and walked over to the office. Just as we entered, I was telling him about recent updates in the workplace. He was listening attentively, his eyes fixed on mine.

Inside, Loveleen introduced us to a new girl. "That is Nandini, Kumar's wife," she said.

The girl turned to her with surprise. "She's quite beautiful," she said, as if Loveleen had previously downplayed it. "Is she Subba Rao's daughter?"

"Yes," Loveleen confirmed.

As we approached, the girl came forward, hugged Kumar, and said, "Thank you, Bhaiyya, for saving my friend's life the other day."

Kumar gently held her shoulders and smiled. "It was nothing. If she's your friend, she's my sister too."

She turned to me, shook my hand and said, "Your cousin Srinivasulu married my friend Pooja."

I nodded, "Oh, okay," and turned to Kumar.

He explained, "She is Sonali. We met on the flight to Vizag. There was a dowry dispute. I told them if they didn't get the amount, I would cover it. The wedding proceeded and the money arrived in time."

Sonali shook my hand again and added, "Thanks to you and your father, they believed Kumar Bhaiyya and went ahead with the wedding."

Kumar invited her to his cabin. I followed along with Sonali while Loveleen and Joy sat on the sofa.

He formally introduced us. "Sonali, this is my wife, Nandini, daughter of Mr. Subba Rao. She's also a partner in our software business along with Joy." He gestured toward Joy. "We used to have computer assembly here, but that's been moved to our new factory, where we've begun manufacturing."

Sonali asked, "What happened to the cure you were going to follow up on?"

Kumar replied, "I sent the chemical composition to the lab through the server." He pointed to a box. "This modem connects to a phone line. I can transmit documents to anyone else with a modem and a telephone. Soon, we'll connect it to a satellite. Our server is upstairs."

"What about the vaccine?" she asked.

"I suggested a method yesterday. They're waiting on certain chemicals from the U.S. As soon as they arrive, testing will begin."

At that point, the three of us began speaking in Telugu. Loveleen and Joy, not understanding the conversation, quietly left the room. Kumar smiled, silently giving them permission to go.

Sonali asked how we fell in love.

I explained, "I first saw him in Dehradun when he came to deliver some items. It was love at first sight. But by the time I got his details, he had left. I tracked down the address he delivered to, but he had already moved to Bombay. Later, when I accompanied my father to a wedding in Guntur, I met him again. He had just collected a cheque for developing some software. I brought him home under the pretext of needing hospital software. He declined my help, saying he could develop it alone. Eventually, our families arranged our marriage during his sister's wedding. So it's part love, part arranged."

Seeing him checking the system, I asked, "Any updates?"

"Not yet," he replied. "No news isn't necessarily good news. The best hope now is a vaccine. By the time symptoms are noticed, many could already be dead."

Kumar tried calling Bob. "He's not reachable," he said, putting down the receiver. "He may have gone to assess the earthquake zone where the virus reportedly escaped."

"Will it affect us?"

"I doubt it. I was just trying to alert him. I'm sure he already knows."

Loveleen came in and reminded us we needed to visit the factory.

Sonali asked, "Can I come too?"

"Hop in," Kumar said as he switched off his computer.

"Nandini, are you coming?"

I replied, "You carry on. I have to meet a client."



Hidden Truths Unfold

After they left, I made a call to Loveleen's maid under the pretense of checking her wellbeing. I inquired about the meals and whether she could

cook Punjabi food. It became evident—Kumar was regularly having his meals at Loveleen’s house.

Then I called our maid and scolded her for not preparing food, confirming my suspicion. I told her to finish lunch preparations.

Joy soon arrived with a project. We discussed it, and I prepared cost estimates. She left.

Kumar returned with Sonali and Loveleen. Sonali left, and Loveleen went home. I sat in front of Kumar as he reviewed project files.

“Let’s go for lunch,” he said.

Afterwards, he called Dimitri. It seemed the medicine combination was showing promise. But as Kumar explained, *medicines alone won’t stop such viruses—only vaccines can.*

He’d already provided a vaccine synthesis method. The only missing components were chemicals, which he had arranged to import from the U.S.

Kumar called Loveleen and asked her to send her driver to take him to the factory. Perhaps he didn’t want to drive, given how burdened he was mentally. Once he left, I walked slowly to the office.

The receptionist handed me a fax—a list of chemical orders from the U.S. I called Monica’s

agent in Vizag to arrange customs clearance and expedited delivery.



Later That Night...

At 6 p.m., I called Kumar. “You eat and sleep,” he said. “I’ll be late.”

“Late” meant anything from hours to not coming home.

I locked the office and returned to the house. I switched on the TV—a rare thing for us—and had dinner alone at 8 p.m. Eventually, I lay down and drifted to sleep.



The Betrayal

Later, returning from a client meeting, I saw our bedroom door closed.

Confused, I opened it—and there they were.

Kumar was with Loveleen. She lay with her feet on the floor, and he was standing, thrusting into her. Shocked, I turned away and collapsed onto the sofa.

Moments later, Kumar rushed out, dressing hastily.

“What are you doing?” I cried.

"Loveleen was feeling lonely... I was just keeping her company."

"Is that what you call keeping company? I'm leaving for Hyderabad. Decide—her or me. If you choose me, come now. If not, I never want to see you again."

Kumar fell to his knees. "I'm sorry, Nandu. I want only you."

"Then pack your bags."

He returned with two bags. "I packed for both of us."

We drove to the airport and flew to Hyderabad.



Starting Over

"I can't stay at my father's house," he said.
"What will people say?"

"Stay with me until we find another house," I replied.

We rented a nearby house.

I asked him to look after the computer department at the hospital.
"I can't," he said. "It feels like I'm eating from my in-laws."

So I helped him find another job.

Eventually, GVK hired him for ₹3,000/month for data entry—an insultingly small amount for a man who once earned lakhs. But he accepted it—for me.

Then my cousin, who had eloped and was too shy to return home, visited us. Kumar came home with a long face.

“What happened?” I asked.

“I modified the software to make data entry faster, but the EDP head scolded me for tweaking it.”

He resigned.

My cousin suggested we move near her home, promising to help him find work. But nothing came through. We returned to stay near my father’s place.

Finally, JK Seeds offered Kumar a data entry job for ₹2,000/month. Initially, they offered even less, but raised it after seeing his qualifications. The EDP head there asked him to develop a fixed assets software module.

Kumar completed the task in just a week. Impressed, they offered him a permanent position as a software developer with a salary of ₹5,000 per month.

Over the next six months, Kumar developed their entire software system. When it came time for

confirmation, they asked him to write a letter to their Head Office. He complied, and they confirmed his appointment—but they didn't offer him any salary increment. After all his effort, this deeply disappointed him.

Later, their EDP Head recommended him for a hospital software development project. Kumar didn't reveal that he had already created such a system. The EDP Head made an agreement with the hospital and helped set up a new company for the development.

Kumar worked relentlessly and, as a result, developed diabetes.

Once the project was complete, the other developers moved on, leaving Kumar alone to handle the software installations. He secured an order for a hospital installation and successfully implemented the system. Impressed, they appointed him as their IT Manager.

Around that time, the hospital where he had previously installed software called him back for maintenance. The doctor, noticing signs of fatigue, advised him to undergo a full-body check-up.

The tests showed elevated cholesterol and abnormal TMT (Treadmill Test) results. He was referred for an angiogram, which revealed critical blockages—90%, 80%, and 70% in three

arteries. He was immediately advised to undergo open-heart surgery.

I insisted he be admitted to our hospital for the procedure.

After the surgery, he lay in bed with tubes attached to his body. I stood by his side, heartbroken, and whispered, “How you were before coming to Hyderabad—and what you’ve become now...”

Suddenly, I woke up. It was a dream.

I woke up and looked at the clock—it was 7:00 a.m. Kumar was still beside me, sleeping peacefully. I didn’t want to wake him and risk disturbing his memory transfers.

I lay back down and drifted off.

By the time I woke again, it was 8:00 a.m. Kumar was already up. I went to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, and came into the hall. He was sitting on the sofa, quietly sipping coffee. He must’ve gotten up just a few minutes before me.

I walked to the kitchen door and asked Rose for a cup of coffee. She said she’d bring it to me, so I returned to the sofa and sat down.

I looked at him—he seemed so calm, so innocent, that I felt an overwhelming urge to kiss him. But then I remembered what the servants had said about him. I was torn—caught between

love and doubt, unsure what was real and what wasn't.

Rose placed the coffee cup on the table in front of me. I nodded my thanks, still watching Kumar.

He turned toward me and raised his eyebrows, silently asking what I was thinking.

I asked, softly, "If I asked you to come to Hyderabad permanently... would you come?"

He replied without hesitation, "Why not? We could restart our career there."

It seems... he has no objection to coming with me.

I didn't expect Kumar to agree so readily to come to Hyderabad, but after considering how things might turn out, I decided not to take that risk.

Still, I needed to confirm with Rose what she saw.

I went into the kitchen and asked, "What did you see that morning between Kumar and Loveleen?"

"I went to give Kumar sir his coffee. He took it and told me to check if Loveleen madam was awake—she was in the guest room. Then he followed me, woke her up, and handed her the coffee."

So, she was sleeping in the guest room, not with him. But why stay over when her house is right next door?

What did Kumar say in my dream? That she was lonely and he was giving her company. Did I misinterpret that as them sleeping together?

Would Loveleen really get involved with Kumar? She's unmarried, her match was arranged by her parents, and her fiancé is wealthy and politically connected. Clearly, her father intends to use the match to gain political leverage.

Kumar, on the other hand, hasn't helped her much politically. He failed to give any concrete strategy for helping her father become CM. He even mentioned Guru was impotent but couldn't back it up with proof. After returning from Delhi, he focused on other things, leaving her father's ambitions behind.

So, why would she still be interested in Kumar?

Perhaps he keeps her around for company. Lately, he's been showing signs of sleep disturbance—talking in his sleep, losing control—so maybe he just needs someone nearby.

Kumar asked, "What are you thinking about?"

I replied, "We still haven't received confirmation that the courier has reached the lab. I've already asked the Vizag agent to pay customs duty."

"They'll arrive in time. Don't worry," he said.

"Was your experiment with the interface successful?"

"I haven't tested the unit yet. I need to connect it to the computer, load the AI software, and authorize the AI to receive data through the interface. Once it does, the AI will interpret the input and sort the information into proper files."

What kind of data could it extract from his brain? Could I see it? Would it reveal anything about his relationship with Loveleen?

We'll have to wait.

I finished my coffee and told him, "I'm going for a bath."

As I turned on the shower, I heard a knock.

"What is it?"

"Can I come in?"

"Come, then."

He entered, dropped his clothes into the basket, and said, "It's been a while since we bathed together."

Later, I stood in front of the mirror, toweling off. I looked at myself. I'm five-foot-three, with a curvy figure. Lately, I've noticed small changes—my shape isn't what it once was, but oddly, my

breasts seem fuller. Maybe it's due to the way he makes love.

Today, he was incredible.

With his improved physique and height, I don't know how anyone could naturally grow like that. It doesn't feel artificial—his whole body seems proportionately enhanced.

He came up behind me, hugged me, and asked, "What are you looking at?"

"Just wondering if I'm still compatible with you."

He kissed my shoulder and said, "There's no question. We are one. You've always been my inspiration, my support. I don't know where I'd be without you."

I smiled as he touched me again, already aroused for another round. I glanced at the time and decided—who's going to question a little lateness today?

We moved to the bed.

After getting dressed, we went to the dining room for breakfast, then headed to the office.

Joy was already working in her cabin. Loveleen hadn't arrived yet.

Kumar asked the office boy to bring the interface device from his car and place it on his table. He then called Joy in and asked her to load the AI

software. She installed it from the server, typed in a few commands, and confirmed it was ready.

Kumar nodded, sat down, and told me to attach the EEG leads to his head.

I fixed the leads, plugged in the device, and powered it up.

He leaned back and closed his eyes.

Joy monitored the screen. "AI is receiving and processing the input," she said.

About thirty minutes later, Kumar opened his eyes. I removed the leads. He typed something into the computer and looked at the screen.

"It's working. It's identifying and sorting the data."

I jumped up in joy and hugged Joy.

Kumar read through the data, made notes, typed something, and sent it through the data transfer system.

"What did you find?" I asked.

"I've noted details relevant to the lab and sent them for action. This batch was about the cure. The vaccine still needs more work—and we're waiting for the chemicals from the U.S."

He leaned back. "I'll do another session, this time for future events."

I reattached the leads and restarted the device. Joy left, and I stayed with him.

This session took longer—over two hours.

When he finally opened his eyes, I removed the leads. He walked over to the sofa, asked for water, then requested tea.

I called the pantry for two cups.

He sipped his tea slowly.

“How are you feeling?”

“Like a weight has lifted off me. I feel clear-headed. Ready to take on more work.”

“That’s great. Let’s go home and rest.”

“We’ll go after an hour. I want to check what I can act on right away.”

I let him work until lunchtime, then went home and set the table. After calling him twice, he arrived.

We ate and then sat in the hall.

Kumar said, “I feel like I finally understand where things are going. I may need a couple more hours with the interface to clear out the rest of this data clutter. Then I’ll be free.”

“But if you clear your mind, won’t you forget the important things? What if something critical

comes up in a consortium meeting and you can't recall it?"

He paused. "That's possible. But the important things... they never really disappear. They stay buried safely in the subconscious."

He went back to the office and called Loveleen.

I let them talk and went out to meet a client.

This client was a hospital—newly constructed and just about to begin operations. I visited and met with the Managing Director, Dr. Jason Rodrigues, a doctor by profession. His daughter, Amanda, handled the hospital's management. Dr. Rodrigues introduced me to her, and we began discussing the pricing. I assured them that I would assist in setting up the hospital, as I had done previously with our own facility in Hyderabad.

Amanda asked, "If you helped set up the hospital, then why aren't you managing it now?"

"I didn't want to stay away from my husband, so I moved here to support his software company. More recently, I also helped set up an R&D lab near Vizag."

Amanda asked, "What are you researching there?"

“We’re working on virus cures. We’ve been tasked with investigating a deadly virus—fatal within hours of infection.”

Jason asked, “Why haven’t we heard about it?”

“It’s been kept secret by the government. In fact, the President was expected to announce it during our lab’s inauguration, but I believe the government intervened and halted the announcement.”

Amanda asked, “How serious is the threat?”

“I can’t speak to the origin, but it’s a very real danger. If the virus spreads among the general population, it could wipe out half the country within months.”

Amanda continued, “So how are you progressing on a cure?”

“We’ve already identified some chemical combinations for medication. But the real focus is on developing a vaccine—it’s the only effective way to manage the virus.”

Jason asked, “And what containment measures are in place?”

“The area was barricaded the last time I saw it—guarded by military personnel. We had visited it to collect samples, wearing full-body protective gear.”

Amanda asked, “How much have you invested in the lab?”

“So far, around ₹30 crores on construction and equipment—excluding land costs.”

Jason followed, “How much land does the lab occupy?”

“The core lab facility is built on 10 acres, with additional surrounding land used as a safety buffer.”

Amanda asked, “How did you manage funding?”

“Fifty percent of the funding came from me, and the rest was pooled by close friends.”

Jason asked, “And who is heading the research?”

“We brought in a Russian scientist named Dimitri as the lab head. He has an assistant with him, also from Russia. All the equipment has been imported from there.”

Amanda asked, “How close are you to developing a vaccine?”

“My husband Kumar visited the lab and provided guidance on how to proceed with vaccine development.”

Jason asked, “But I thought Kumar was from a commerce background. How does he contribute to something so scientific?”

“He says he’s connected to the future—he’s developing an AI system to extract future data. In fact, he already transmitted a chemical formula for medication to the lab, and he’s now waiting for future data regarding the vaccine so he can relay it to the team.”

Jason said, “He seems far more resourceful than we’d assumed.”

I added, “He’s part of a consortium of major Indian corporations that focus on future technologies. Recently, they secured the Railway Ticketing System project using a data-transfer protocol developed by Kumar. That same system is used for our lab communications. Kumar creates the documentation, uploads it to our server, and it’s received instantly by the lab.”

Amanda asked, “Where did the funding for this come from?”

“Kumar developed this software initially for a courier company. They paid him ₹50 lakhs—which became the seed money for our current ventures. Now, we also have a factory assembling electronic components and computers. I’ve brought you a quote for our computers, which are manufactured in-house. That’s why we can offer the lowest prices on the market. We’ve started importing only key components like chips, while we manufacture everything else here—PCBs, heatsinks, fans, resistors, capacitors, etc. In fact, our hardware

division may soon outpace our software division.”

Jason observed, “So you’ve got three verticals—software, hardware, and the lab.”

Amanda asked, “What’s the ownership structure?”

“Our software company is split—Kumar holds 50%, I hold 25%, and our development partner holds the remaining 25%. For the assembly division, Kumar owns 70%, and the remaining 30% is shared by three of his associates. As for the manufacturing company, the structure is a bit unclear because it was funded by a man named Bob. He originally suggested we invest in manufacturing, but then convinced us to set up the lab. He paid for all U.S. equipment and import duties. We suspect currency restrictions made it easier for him to use our channel.”

They exchanged surprised glances.

“I’m sorry,” I added. “I may have gone on too long.”

Amanda smiled. “Not at all. We were genuinely curious. We’d heard Kumar was just a commerce graduate and wondered if perhaps it was his partners who provided the technical knowledge.”

I shook my head. “That’s a misunderstanding. In fact, he was the one who brought Joy—our

development partner—into the business. When I first met him at his sister's wedding, Joy, Leena's mother Sahithi, and his then-girlfriend Sunitha were all missing. Joy had been abducted by a college senior, Sahithi had been kidnapped and trafficked, and Sunitha was presumed dead in a plane crash. I had asked Kumar to develop hospital management software. He did it all from memory—without consulting a single reference or even asking for my input. After the software was done, I tested it and made only minor changes. He told me I'd already given him all the information he needed."

Jason asked, "But how did you know he only studied commerce?"

"At a recent party, Raj mentioned it—he had a couple of drinks and was telling stories about how Kumar and Sahithi met, how their daughter Leena came to be, and how Sahithi left the baby. He even spoke about time travel, but none of us understood it."

I replied, "Honestly, I don't fully understand that either. But seeing Leena, all grown up, we have to believe it—or she's someone else he's chosen to raise."

Amanda asked, "So you're saying he already had the software skills when you met?"

"I stayed with him for over two weeks while he developed the hospital software. He never once

referred to a book. He's also created factory software, anticipating future developments. He says everything he does is with the future in mind. For example, he's pushing to bring broadband internet to India—long before the government plans to introduce dial-up connections by 1995. His version will use direct cable lines, much faster than phone-based access."

Amanda looked puzzled. "What is the Internet?"

"It's what will connect us to the world—allowing real-time communication and information access. Kumar says mobile phones will soon let us talk to anyone, anywhere—even while we're on the move. They've already leased a transponder on INSAT-1C for communication purposes."

"You mean the satellite?" Amanda asked.

"Yes," I confirmed.

"What will they do with it?"

"They'll use it for data communication. I'm not fully sure of the specifics, but Kumar talks about remote surgeries, robotic arms assisting in operations, and real-time video consultations between specialists across countries. He's drafting a proposal to present to the consortium."

Jason asked, "Who's in this consortium?"

“All the major industry leaders—Tata, Birla, Godrej, Mehta. Mr. Godrej is especially close to Kumar, and Mr. Tata often leads their strategic discussions. The government sometimes invites Kumar for consultations too.”

Amanda said, “We’ve learned a lot today. Shall we go visit the hospital and review our setup requirements?”

We finished the hospital round, and I offered Amanda some suggestions on where services could be improved.

After the tour, I said, “I’ll send over the proposal for the software application shortly. I’ve already submitted the hardware quote. Please consider us for your purchases.”

I returned to the office. As I entered, I saw Loveleen stepping out of Kumar’s cabin. I smiled at her, and she smiled back.

“Client meeting?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yes, a hospital.”

I opened the door to Kumar’s cabin. He was still seated with the interface leads attached and the machine running. The screen displayed data streaming in and being sorted by the AI. I sat down and quietly watched.

Two hours passed with no movement. Concerned, I went over and checked his

breathing—it was steady. I gently touched his shoulder, and as I did, the data stream on the monitor slowed and then stopped. He opened his eyes slowly. I removed the leads. He sat still for a moment, then I led him home and seated him at the dining table.

I placed the serving bowls on the table and served his meal. He ate in silence, washed his hands, then reclined on the sofa, placing his legs on the table. With his eyes closed, he seemed lost in deep thought—or meditation.

I sat beside him and must have dozed off.

The phone rang, waking me. Kumar's eyes were still shut. I picked up the call—it was from Amanda, seeking clarification on the software proposal. I answered her questions and ended the call.

When I returned to the sofa, I checked his pulse. It was normal. He appeared to be in a deep meditative state. I stayed with him quietly.

After about an hour, Kumar opened his eyes.

“Sorry I couldn’t respond earlier,” he said. “I was receiving new data—it wasn’t from the usual source. This time, it was another version of me—he was in a courtroom, involved in a legal case about his company. But he didn’t seem worried. He believed even if the opposition won, he’d lose nothing. That was the last scene. I’ll need to

upload it and see what it all means. As my mind clears, more information is coming through, but I don't yet know how it will all help."

Back at the office, Kumar asked me to reconnect the interface leads. Once the AI began processing the new data, I went back to my own work.

Later...

Joy came into my cabin, concerned.

"Dolly showed up and sat in Kumar's office. He went in and spoke to the watchman too. I think he warned him. What do we do?"

"Let's go see."

We approached the office quietly. Inside, Kumar was instructing Dolly to attach the leads. He told her not to disturb him, then turned on the machine.

Moments later, he removed the leads and said to her, "You were sitting in a political office—on a U-shaped sofa. Policemen entered, and you tried to run but were caught. A politician's PA identified you as someone waiting to meet his boss. You were arrested. During interrogation, you mentioned an RK, and he was arrested too. Later, a man resembling me visited you. You asked how I came back from the dead. I told you

I wasn't the same person—but someone who looked like him."

Dolly looked amazed. "So this machine can show the future? Can it show the past too?"

Kumar nodded. "Yes, both."

"Then I want to see who had me arrested."

"Okay, but don't open your eyes until I say. If you do, you might forget everything."

She agreed. He attached the leads again and initiated the process.

Kumar stepped outside the room, closing the door behind him.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm cleansing her mind—removing details of her activities. I'm also extracting her memories and passing them to the police. You should call the SI to come and take her into custody."

I called the SI. "This is Nandini, Kumar's wife. Dolly is here, and Kumar has extracted data from her through an interface machine. She's safe, no weapons."

He said, "I'm on my way."

"No rush. She won't regain awareness for at least another hour."

When the police came and took Dolly, I asked Kumar, "What just happened?"

"She's likely experiencing amnesia now. I modified the machine to extract her full memory—it worked."

"Be careful with that device."

"I know. I don't plan to use it frequently—once a week at most. But I'm also thinking of helping Sahithi. I don't know how much trauma she endured during her kidnapping."

"You have to be cautious. What if she loses her memory too?"

"That's why I'm adding a security patch. Dolly was a test case."

"So, you did that deliberately?"

"Yes. I couldn't risk her tipping off her gang. She came here with doubts. Now, she's out of play."

"What else did you learn from your sessions?"

"I've started organizing information from multiple timelines. The AI helped separate them, and I've been making notes."

"Can I read them?"

"Once I'm done. Mixing timelines could create confusion."

"Fine. What's the occasion for Saturday's party?"

"I'm announcing Ram's engagement to Nishitha."

"Oh," I said casually. Did he forget my birthday on Sunday? Fine, let him. I'll find a way to make him remember.

"I'm going to my cabin," I said and walked away.

On the way, I passed Joy. She winked at me. What was that about?

Then I saw Loveleen walking into Kumar's room. I wanted to follow her and listen but controlled myself and went to my chair.

Just then, the receptionist called. "Amanda is on the line."

"Connect me."

We discussed pricing again. Then I mentioned, "We're having a party on Saturday."

Amanda said, "Yes, I received the invitation already."

They've already sent invitations? Who arranged that? Was Joy's wink about that? Is Kumar planning a surprise for me? Is this a secret birthday celebration? That might explain all the whispering.

Lunchtime...

Kumar came to my cabin to call me for lunch. As I walked to our house, I saw Loveleen following behind us.

Why is she coming too? Did Kumar invite her?

He opened the backdoor with his keys. Loveleen walked in and sat beside him at the dining table. I went to the kitchen to bring the dishes.

A knock at the door—it was Jyothi, Loveleen's maid—carrying more dishes.

"Madam sent these," she said.

"Alright, place them on the table."

I sat across from them, observing their dynamic. They looked... comfortable. As if this was routine. Did they get this close during my absence?

But something about Loveleen was different today. Softer. Calmer. Did Kumar share his visions with her? Is that what changed her?

Kumar asked, "Why have you stopped eating?"

"I'm just noticing some changes in you."

"Maybe because I've been clearing mental clutter."

"And physically—you've gotten taller. You've gained muscle."

“I know! I might have to replace my whole wardrobe.”

I said it casually, just to shift his focus from Loveleen.

Still, I wondered—did my decision to leave for the lab give them room to grow closer? Was it a mistake? But I did it for the greater good.

Soon, I’ll need to check on the lab’s vaccine development progress. If successful, we’ll invite Dimitri and the team to the party. Then there’s Sonali and her father—perhaps they can help manufacture the vaccine once it’s ready.



The Day of the Party

Monica called and asked me to come to Loveleen's house. To my surprise, all my friends were already there.

"What are you all doing here?" I asked, slightly puzzled.

Praveen responded, "We just wanted to inform you—Dimitri has arrived."

"That's why you called me here?" I asked, still confused. "What are you really doing here?"

"Kumar invited us for your birthday party," he replied with a grin. "He told us to wait until midnight."

Suspicious, I made my way to the party to confront Kumar.

Loveleen intercepted me.

"What's going on here?" I asked, sharply. "Where did you go? Why didn't you tell me?"

"If I didn't tell you, did you think you wouldn't find out?" she countered.

"I already did. My friends were at your place and called me about Dimitri."

She rolled her eyes. "They're clueless. Kumar actually just announced Ram and Nishitha's engagement."

“And?”

“And he gifted them the computer assembly company as a wedding present.”

“Why would he do that? Does this have anything to do with his knowledge of alternate timelines?”

“It could,” she admitted.

I went to find Kumar and pulled him aside. Loveleen followed.

“Why did you give them the company?” I asked, trying to remain calm.

Kumar replied, “Because in one timeline, a future version of me saw that they split away and claimed their share—causing problems in the company. So, I preempted that. I gave them their share now, on my terms. They can do what they want with it. But before I handed it over, I made sure to sign an agreement: they’ll have to buy all spare parts from us and manufacture PCBs for our projects—including future tech like the interface.”

“Do you think they’ll stick to that?”

“They have no choice. It’s a clause in the contract. If they don’t like it, they can return the company. But it’s better to make a few PCBs than give up a whole company.”

“So, it’s a clever strategy to push Ram into working harder. Nishitha will likely motivate him, and it will ultimately benefit your business. And your parents will see it as a generous gesture to your brother.”

“Exactly. My sister is no longer my responsibility—my parents will handle her. I’ll support them if needed, but I’m focused on other things.”

Kumar returned to the crowd and announced, “Dinner is ready for those who want to eat, but stay around—we have another celebration at midnight.”

Some headed to dinner, others returned to the bar. Krishna brought a bottle of champagne, handed it to Kumar, who passed it to Ram to open and pour. Kumar kissed Nishitha lightly on the cheek and rejoined me.

Just then, Amanda and her father, Dr. Jason Rodrigues, arrived.

I introduced them. Amanda shook hands with Kumar and smiled.

“We’ve heard a lot about you,” she said.

“From whom?” he asked.

“Nandini, of course. If you have a moment, we’d like to discuss something with you.”

Loveleen leaned over. “Go ahead,” she said. “I’ll bring your friends from my house.”

Amanda continued, “I want to invest with you—after hearing about your future-oriented plans.”

Kumar asked, “In which field are you looking to invest? And how much?”

Amanda glanced at her father—but just then, all hell broke loose.

My friends burst in with a birthday cake and smeared it on my face.

Sonali approached, and Kumar quickly introduced her to Amanda and Jason before saying, “I’ll be back shortly.”

I went inside, cleaned up, changed clothes, and returned. My friends brought out a three-tier cake for me to cut. I started with Kumar and fed cake to everyone around. It was the best birthday celebration I’d ever had.

Last year was a small affair at home—just a Friday night dinner. But this year was grand. Kumar had announced his brother’s engagement, and gifted the consortium satellite phones. They’re bulky but practical—perfect for keeping in a car or bag. I wondered how he funded that—was it from the consortium account?

Shortly after, my parents arrived. I hugged Mom and told her about Ram and Nishitha. They went to congratulate Kumar's father. Mr. Patel was positively glowing—his daughter had received 35% of the company.

Still, I was quietly miffed at Kumar for giving away his share of the assembly unit. I wasn't sure what it was worth, but it seemed impulsive. Maybe he thought it wasn't worth managing. If he had given away the manufacturing unit, I'd be furious—more than ₹20 crores had gone into it, all funded by Bob.

The party ended on a high note.

After the Party

Later that night, we changed out of our party clothes. He sat on the bed, and I sat beside him.

"What gave you the idea to hand over the company?" I asked. "Was it Mr. Patel's suggestion?"

"Why would I take advice from him?" Kumar replied. "I made this move because I didn't want to give them anything else. This deal ensures they support us without splitting away later. Plus, it gives me freedom to focus on more important things. Bob gave me blueprints for some futuristic devices. I want to replicate them now and understand their purpose."

He continued, "With these satellite phones, the consortium will see the bigger picture. I think I now have a vision that reaches to 2020. Bob once said he can't travel beyond 2020—the future becomes uncertain. I think he's planning something big around that time."

He explained that in one timeline, his alter ego died in his sleep—possibly poisoned—and that his girlfriend was killed the same way. Now, a younger version of him had taken over the company and received the blueprints from Bob. His mission? To build those instruments.

"I need to finish decoding the blueprints," he said. "Only then will I fully understand. Where are your friends?"

"At Loveleen's house—after-party," I replied.

I couldn't sleep. I felt an unexplained unease. I went downstairs, saw a half-empty bottle on the table, and poured myself a drink. I thought about how Sonali was drawn to Kumar, how Amanda now seemed interested too. He had a magnetic pull, and I had brought these women into his orbit.

The house was quiet. I looked toward Loveleen's house—lights on but no sound. I had the urge to peek in, but scolded myself. *Let them party*, I thought. *Why should I care?*

I refilled my glass. Kumar came downstairs, grabbed a water bottle, and sat beside me.

“Couldn’t sleep?” he asked.

“I felt uneasy... found the bottle and poured a drink.”

“I’m not worried about the virus—we’re ahead with the lab’s work. We’ll soon see results.”

“It’s not the virus. It’s just this strange dread.”

He held me gently, and I slowly calmed down. I rested in his arms, and before I knew it, I was asleep.

Later, I woke and found him still up, sitting on the bed.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” I asked.

“I was reviewing the vaccine development timelines.”

“Forget it for tonight,” I said. “Come back to bed.”

He lay down beside me. His presence comforted me, and I finally slept peacefully.



The Morning After

I woke, brushed my teeth, and went downstairs. Kumar was already up.

"Coffee?" he asked.

I nodded. He brought me a fresh cup.

"What was that last night?" he asked.

"I don't know. I felt despair. Dread."

"You shouldn't feel that way on your birthday," he said, kissing me. "Happy birthday."

"Thank you," I whispered with a faint smile.

Maybe he sensed I hadn't completely shaken the feeling. He led me back to bed and gave me the best gift he could—his love. After that, the dread melted away, and I slept soundly.



Thoughts for the Future

Later, I saw him sitting in deep thought.

"A penny for your thoughts?" I asked.

"I'm thinking about the blueprints Bob gave to one of my other selves."

"What are they for?"

"I'm not sure yet. But they're important. I need drafting software so the AI can help. I'll have Mahira check for one."

He called Mahira and asked her to look into drafting software options.

Kumar's mind never rests. He plans to invest excess capital from the software division into medical devices. He believes they have a huge future market.

And I trust him.

He has never failed.

Sometimes, I wonder if I can even keep up. His mind leaps decades ahead—always exploring, always building. There's a quote from *Star Trek* that fits him perfectly:

"To boldly go where no man has gone before."



Setting Up the Network

Kumar secured a transponder on the INSAT-1C satellite. He ordered a large dish antenna and had it installed in the backyard, linking it directly to his system on the first floor of the house.

With the help of his brother, he developed a device called a *transporter*. They installed one each at the office and the factory, conducting several rounds of testing to ensure functionality. After confirming successful operations, Kumar assembled two more sets—one was sent to Delhi, the other to Hyderabad.

Kumar and his brother then travelled to Delhi to install the systems personally.

Unexpected Arrival

Later, Kumar sent a girl named Kajal from Delhi via the transporter. He instructed Joy to escort her to his flat in Andheri.

Who is this girl? Why did Kumar send her here?

That question lingered in my mind when Kumar called me.

“Has the transporter reached your hospital?” he asked.

“It’s expected to arrive tonight,” I replied.

“I’ll try to come by tomorrow.”

“Is your work finished?”

“Finished... but we got into a tricky situation.”

“What kind of situation?”

“I’ll explain later,” he said abruptly, and ended the call.

The Arrival of Prachi

That evening, the doorbell rang. I opened it to find Kumar standing there with a young woman beside him.

“This is Prachi,” he said, handing over her luggage before stepping inside.

Prachi glanced at the man near the gate and asked, "Is he your watchman? He looks more like a police constable."

Kumar smiled slightly. "You have a good eye. He *is* a police constable. In fact, all the staff across the three bungalows and even the paan shop opposite are undercover officers."

She raised an eyebrow. "Are you some kind of VIP?"

"Not exactly," he said casually. "We just have some ongoing security issues."

He didn't elaborate further.

Kumar asked me to show Prachi to the guest room. I took her upstairs while he went into our bedroom to change. By the time I returned, he was sitting on the bed, thoughtful but relaxed.

I sat beside him. "What happened? Who was that girl you sent through the transporter?"

He sighed. "I thought her life was in danger, so I moved her here. We negotiated a deal, and as a result, Rajveer Singh will be appointed Deputy CM."

I frowned. "Will that be enough to satisfy them?"

"I hope so," he said. "At least for now. Is Prachi comfortable?"

"She's already snoring."

He smiled faintly. “Then let’s go to sleep.”

Chapter 8

We landed at Hyderabad airport, collected our handbags and light luggage, and stepped outside. Dad had sent the car with a driver to pick us up. Meanwhile, Prachi and Kajal were still in Bombay, enjoying the seashore and beaches.

Kumar suggested letting them stay there until things calmed down in Delhi. From what he told me, I initially thought Guru was a psychopath. But when Prathap took things further, he proved to be even worse. I honestly don't understand what's wrong with these men. Instead of simply enjoying time with the girls—even if they are call girls—they treat them so terribly. I can understand what happened with Dimple, but why did he do that to Sonia? She was pretending to be Loveleen. Would he have done the same if the real Loveleen had been there? Is this why Kumar wants to keep her away from Guru? Did he foresee something like this happening? Regardless, Sonia is in a terrible situation.

We went straight to the hospital, where the CT scan machine was being unloaded. Since setup would take time, we headed to the house. The transporter machine's outer casing had been delivered and the board and other parts had arrived as well. Kumar set it up, connected it to the power supply, and switched it on. He called Bombay and asked them to send our luggage through the transporter instead of having us

carry it. We had lunch and returned to the hospital, where the CT machine was being installed in its designated location.

Two technicians from the USA had arrived—one trained in setting up the machine, and the other in operating and conducting scans. It took the whole day to configure everything. We invited the Chief Minister (CM) to inaugurate the machine. He cut the ribbon, switched it on, and stayed until the first test was completed and results were in.

With the CM's presence, we received free press coverage. The next machine will be installed at Rodrigues Hospitals. If other hospitals see us operating successfully, they might place their own orders. One advantage we have is our existing relationships with hospitals across India, either from selling software or from them approaching us. Only large hospitals can afford this machine, but there are enough of them that even installing one per major city could help us recover our investment within a year.

“I'll run the hospital and manage the CT scan for a while,” Kumar said, before returning to Bombay via the transporter. This machine is incredibly useful for moving between locations. It could allow us to set up branches all over India and move between them with ease.

Kumar mentioned the next installation might be in Manali. He says the 16-hour journey is too

long—but maybe he just wants to see Sunitha again. Still, wouldn't that risk revealing the transporter to the public? Or does he want to? So far, we've only tested it on the surface. Could it transport people to a space lab? Or even to the Moon? We could launch space tourism and become billionaires. Kumar hasn't shared his plans with me lately. He used AI to generate the blueprints and has secured them with multiple layers of protection. Perhaps he wants to develop a few more inventions before going public. Maybe he fears too much attention.

I just got a call from maintenance—they're having an issue I need to check out. Why does everything break down when I'm visiting?

I had requested that at least two technicians from the radiology department be trained to operate the CT scan. Once the installation was completed, I sent the installation technician back through the transporter. This device has made intercity travel incredibly convenient—no more waiting at airports or dealing with the hassle of travel.

Kumar returned to the office.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"I went to the U.S. to file patents. That way, our inventions will be legally protected. Even though I retrieved them from the future, Bob apparently got them from me in the first place."

I nodded. "Rose mentioned I came to her asking about you. What was that about?"

"When did you go to her?" he asked, surprised.

"When we were in Hyderabad for the CT scan installation."

"How would I know if you met her? What exactly did she say?"

"She said she was talking about you, and I showed no reaction. But she felt something was off. She said she couldn't stop talking that day, even though she wanted to. It was like something compelled her."

I paused, then asked, "What happened to that shape-shifting machine you were working on?"

"There seems to be a glitch. I tried it on myself and showed Loveleen, but she said she could still see the original me—not the person I was trying to become. I think something's off with the system."

I narrowed my eyes. "Are you lying? Show me. I want to see it in action."

He took me to a room, placed a hair in the machine, powered it on, and put on the transformation coat.

"I still see only you," I said.

"Try it on yourself. Look in the mirror after switching it on."

I did, but the reflection showed only myself. "There's definitely something wrong. Are you sure you got the blueprints right?"

"I'll have to double-check. Maybe the PCB has the wrong ICs. It's a big job—I'll look into it later." He powered down the machine and asked me to remove the coat.

I took it off and handed it back. Seeing me undressed, he moved closer, kissed me, and things escalated. We ended up having sex in that very room.

Afterwards, we dressed, unlocked the door, and stepped out. Kumar set the alarm and we returned to the office.

"Was the Rodrigues Hospital installation completed?" he asked.

"Yes, they're just waiting for the technician to operate the machine."

"That's the issue—we didn't think of timing. The technician needs to finish his training before going there."

"You should've called him a day later, after verifying the machine. That way, he could return and complete his training. Use the transporter—it's meant for this kind of situation."

"I'm taking one transporter machine and heading to Manali. After installation, I'll call you. Please arrange for Sunitha's parents to come; I promised them a visit to see their daughter."

"How are you getting there?"

"I rented a van. I'll load the machine and travel with it—it should take about three days."

"What will you do for three days in a van?"

"I printed all the recovered data from the mind scan. I plan to study it during the trip." He pointed to stacks of printed pages in boxes nearby.

"You've got a lot of work ahead," I said.

Later, Kumar called. "I've reached Manali and I'm about to install the transporter. Send the driver to pick up Sunitha's parents. I want them to come here using the transporter."

I sent the driver to Sunitha's house. Apparently, Kumar had already informed them in advance.

They arrived at our house within half an hour. I called Kumar and let him know I was sending

their luggage first. I placed their bags into the transporter, set the location to Manali, and hit the send switch.

Next, Sunitha's father sat in the transporter and I sent him through. But when it was Sunitha's mother's turn, she hesitated. She seemed scared—worried about what might happen to her.

I called Kumar and let her speak with her husband, who reassured her that it was completely safe. After that, she agreed to use the transporter.

I sent her through, closed the door, and went to my room.

Return Home and Timeline Revelations

The doorbell rang. I opened it to find Kumar standing there.

"Your luggage came back two days ago. Where did you go?" I asked.

"I went to visit Sonia. She's better now but still in the hospital. We returned by train."

"By train? Why?"

"I needed the time to finish reading."

"What did you find?"

“According to my estimates, there are six alternate timelines in existence right now—excluding ours. The first split occurred after his marriage. The second happened after we completed SSC. Four more timelines, including mine, diverged after junior college, when Sneha was taken away by her parents.”

“In my timeline, I was slapped and became a delivery boy. The rest you know. Later, the timeline split again—into Pujari’s and mine. When Sneha came to Vijayawada, they eloped to a place near Vizag. There, he became a doctor, then a pujari, and eventually a Godman or Swamiji, with political connections and Swiss bank accounts. Then he turned philanthropic and opened ashrams.”

“He’s the one who took Sahithi and raised Leena for seven years. In another version, Kumar forgets Sahithi and marries someone else—his daughter Leena was kidnapped at one and raised by the ‘dead Kumar.’ I’ve mentioned him before.”

“One recurring figure across timelines is Suresh. In our timeline, he kidnaps Sahithi and kills her parents. In Pujari’s timeline, he murders the entire family. But in the dead Kumar’s version, he doesn’t harm them—maybe because Sahithi marries him and lives in a house gifted by her grandmother.”

The Alter Ego and Virus Timeline

“Recently, another Kumar was sent into dead Kumar’s timeline after my alter ego was killed. His life was different—after SSC, he joined a diploma course in Bombay and learned shorthand and typing. He started working for a paint company where Nishitha’s father worked. Later, he worked at a hotel, met two girls, and under difficult circumstances, took them to Vijayawada.”

“In 1983, Bob met him and sent him to 2017. There, he ran a highway hotel. He eventually discovered an inheritance coming his way and began studying computers.”

“There’s an interesting event in 2019—a virus pandemic that brought the country to its knees. Everything shut down except essential services. During that time, he claimed his inheritance. Bob had arranged it so he would inherit all the companies of the dead Kumar. I believe Bob orchestrated his placement as a replacement for my alter ego.”

“My sister and her daughter also enter the picture here. She recognized him as the one who went missing years ago, despite being in a different timeline. Bob gave him the blueprints for all the inventions I’ve started developing. Without the interface machine and AI, none of this would’ve been possible.”

Morning Routine and Business Affairs

"Go take a bath. I'll serve breakfast," I told him.

"I'm going," he replied, and after bathing, returned to the dining table.

As he finished breakfast, he asked, "Any updates from my brother?"

"He said some ICs are unavailable."

"I'll check with him. Maybe we'll import them."

He called Ram's satellite phone. "You mentioned ICs are unavailable? ...They may not be in the market yet. I'll contact manufacturers in the US." He ended the call.

At the office, Joy greeted us and inquired about the DCM's daughters.

"They're at your flat," he said. "They'll visit the office later."

Kumar then called Dimitri about manufacturing a vaccine for an outer space virus.

"I'll ask Bob for more additives," he said. "Sonali's father is setting up a small facility to help with production. I'll send a transporter to the lab for easy transfer between Bombay and the lab."

He called Mahira. "Send a fully assembled transporter, packed in a wooden crate, to Vizag via surface courier."

I returned to my cabin.

Discussion on Politics and Strategic Planning

Later, I entered Kumar's cabin and found Loveleen there.

"What's the serious discussion?" I asked.

"She was asking about Kajal and Prachi," Kumar explained.

"What about them?"

"Kajal was threatened by Prathap. I promised Prachi we'd get revenge. That's why she kept quiet."

"How?"

"By committing him to a mental institution. He's abusing his father's power—and now he has Guru's support. If both unite, it's dangerous. But we can't touch him unless we remove Dharmendra Singh from the CM's chair."

I looked at Loveleen. "So the only way is to make your father the next CM."

"How do we do that?" she asked.

"Turn the tables," Kumar replied. "Use their actions against them."

"Nandini, guide Loveleen through the strategy. I need to focus on electronics," he said.

Why is he pushing her to me? Did something happen between them on the Manali trip?

Wedding Preparations and Family Conversations

Kumar returned later. "I went to fix the mahurat for Ram and Nishitha's wedding. We'll review invitation card samples with Mom this evening."

The phone rang. It was Mr. Lal from the courier company, asking about Kumar. He invited him to the wedding.

We headed to his parents' house in Wadala. The power was out, so we waited. Once it returned, we took the elevator up.

Leena opened the door. "Daddy!" she shouted, hugging him. She took the samples and asked, "Are these for Uncle's wedding?"

"Yes, we'll show them to Grandma."

His mother reviewed them. "Print them in Telugu too," she insisted.

"I'll get those done in Hyderabad," I said.

His mother asked, "You gave Ram a share in the factory, but why Nishitha too?"

"She's business-minded. If she's a partner, she'll push Ram for better performance. Besides, this

ensures they won't interfere in my other ventures."

Leena's Gift and Future Plans

Leena asked, "Daddy, what gift should I give Uncle for the wedding?"

"Forget that. I have a gift for you—25% partnership in the new medical equipment company."

I asked, "Which company?"

"The one manufacturing CT scans and MRIs. I used my withdrawn capital for the investment."

"You didn't withdraw from the software company?"

"I'll discuss that later. I need both your permissions for that."

Leena hugged him. "Thank you, Daddy."

The doorbell rang again. Her grandfather arrived. She excitedly told him about the gift.

Kumar discussed cards, then we left.

Private Conversations and Future Concerns

On the drive home, I asked, "Why did you name the company after Leena?"

"She's my daughter, but legally adopted. I didn't want future disputes."

"You think I'd treat her differently?"

"We've never talked about kids. What's your opinion?"

"I haven't thought much about it."

"If you don't want kids, I need to know. I might plan differently."

"Someone else?"

"Maybe. Not Loveleen—she'll get Dhruv. I meant adopting Atul and Reena."

"Why them?"

"Fate or Bob might bring them into our lives."

"What's Bob's interest in us?"

"He's like a guardian. And now, another Leena—scientist from a different timeline—is researching viruses."

The Big Picture: Bob, Pandemics, and Global Events

"You're saying your daughter might become a scientist too?"

"Possibly. In other timelines, Atul, Reena, and Dhruv are in software."

"You mentioned only seven timelines."

"There were more, but two Kumars died. Replacements were sent. I was told in the Himalayas that I'm being prepared."

"For what?"

"I don't know. Maybe for another pandemic or war. Bob is setting up underground bunkers. He said he'll give me one from Pujari Kumar's timeline."

"How?"

"I don't know. But there's definitely a looming crisis."

"Is it the virus we developed a vaccine for?"

"No. That virus is deadlier. This one mutates slowly. Death rate is high but not as catastrophic. Bob was told not to interfere with it."

"Where did you get the funding?"

"I withdrew from the assembly company before handing it to Ram and Nishitha. Others have invested in their children too."

"I'm not criticizing. You gave me a 25% share before marriage. That shows you trust me and Joy."

"It's more than trust," he said quietly.

Politics and Final Reflections

“What’s the plan for Loveleen’s father?”

“Elections are due mid-1991. We need to destabilize Dharmendra Singh before then.”

“What if we invite Manohar Das and Rajveer Khanna to Bombay for a consultation?”

“Good idea. Let them build rapport. When the time comes, they can rebel against the CM.”

“What’s our gain if Rajveer becomes CM?”

“Besides fulfilling our promise to Loveleen, we gain political leverage for our companies.”

As we reached home, the maid greeted us.

“Madam, dinner is on the table. I’m heading home.”

I nodded.

Scene 1: Laying the Political Plan

I called Loveleen and said, “We’ve come up with a plan regarding your father. Please come over.”

She asked, “Did you have dinner?”

“Yes, we just finished,” I replied.

“Then I’ll eat quickly and come,” she said.

True to her word, she had dinner in a hurry and soon arrived at our bungalow. We were seated on the sofa when she walked in and took a seat opposite us, eyes filled with curiosity.

I began, "Our next objective is to make your father the next Chief Minister. Right now, we've used blackmail to force Dharmendra Singh to appoint him as Joint DCM, but that won't hold for long. Dharmendra will eventually try to regain the upper hand, and when he does, the consequences could be dangerous."

I continued, "Prathap may try to target other girls next. The fact that he dared to act against Sonia, the opposition leader's daughter, is unthinkable. Maybe he believed she wasn't really Loveleen, or maybe Guru influenced him—we may never know. Our priority is to stop both of them from causing further harm. As long as Dharmendra Singh remains in power, Prathap will act with impunity. Now that Guru has partnered with him, their actions could escalate."

Kumar added, "You saw how terrified the doctor was of Guru. He refused to speak, saying Guru had powerful political connections. I had to use my satellite line to reach the CID and the PM's Office. But unless they commit their crimes in our jurisdiction, I can't use the CID against them."

I nodded. "Which leaves us with only one real solution: have both Prathap and Guru committed to a mental asylum."

"And to do that," Kumar added, "we have to remove Prathap's father from office."

"That means your father must ally with Manohar Das," I said, turning to Loveleen.

She asked, "How do you plan to make that happen?"

"We invite Manohar Das to Bombay for a discussion, using his daughters as the reason. We'll use Ram's wedding as an excuse to bring him and your father together."

Loveleen nodded, got up, and said, "Then I'll take my leave." She left for her house.

Scene 2: Unrest and Planning

That night, I woke from a troubled sleep. My dreams had been full of strategy meetings and political maneuverings. In the morning, I called Prachi to come to the office—I needed to discuss something with her.

When we reached the office, Loveleen was already there, having finished her morning discussion with Joy. I went to my cabin while Kumar retreated into his, saying he was going to

tweak the AI to clear unwanted memories from the brain.

Scene 3: The Amanda Meeting

I approached Kumar and said, “I’m heading out to meet Amanda to finalize the order.”

“If she asks for a discount, don’t refuse. Just finalize it—she’s our partner now,” he replied.

I nodded and left for the meeting.

When I arrived, I found Sonali already there. Amanda had invited her. I didn’t mind—at least I hadn’t brought Kumar along.

It seemed Amanda and Sonali had connected at Ram’s engagement party, where Sonali had shared her experiences at the lab. Amanda was now considering investing with Mr. Amit Mukherjee as well.

I explained that Mukherjee Pharmaceuticals would produce the virus medicines and distribute them, while the vaccines would be developed through a joint venture. Kumar would handle equipment procurement and imports, while Mr. Mukherjee would provide factory space. A new company would be created for the vaccine production.

Amanda responded, "I've discussed it with my father, and we're interested in investing in this project."

"Great. We'll all sit down soon and finalize the details," I said.

I returned to the office, called Kumar for lunch, and headed back to the house.

Scene 4: Lunch and Legal Maneuvers

Kumar arrived with Loveleen and Sahithi.

"Why so late?" I asked.

"Constables came to collect Dolly's printed material. With that evidence, they can keep her in jail indefinitely," Kumar replied.

I turned to Sahithi. "How come you're here?"

"Kumar called me," she said simply.

I assumed it was for a business meeting and didn't press further.

Jyothi brought Loveleen's lunch dishes and placed them on the table. Kumar asked me to serve everyone.

After lunch, Kumar invited Sahithi to the study to discuss business. Loveleen followed them in, and they settled in for their meeting.

Scene 1: The Mystery of Ramesh and an Attempt to Break Them Apart

Kumar called me and asked me to come to his cabin with Rose—he needed to speak with both of us.

Ten minutes later, I walked in with Rose. We sat down, and Kumar looked directly at her.

“You told Nandini something when she came to see you during her Hyderabad trip. What was it?” he asked.

Rose replied, “A man named Ramesh came to me, gave me ₹1000, and told me to say certain things to madam when she visited. He instructed me to tell her those things when you weren’t around.”

Kumar turned to me. “It looks like this Ramesh is trying to create a rift between us—whether it’s out of jealousy or business rivalry, I’m not sure yet. But be cautious about what anyone tells you. I’ve asked the CID to investigate the matter. I’ll get to the bottom of this and find out who’s behind it.”

I asked, “How do you plan to do that?”

“As I said, the CID is on it now.”

If what Kumar said was true, someone was deliberately targeting us, trying to drive a wedge between us. But what could they gain from that?

Is someone interested in Kumar—or in me?

No one has ever approached me romantically, except once in the U.S., where a man tried to propose. I shut him down so strongly that no one ever dared again. Could this be revenge? I can't even remember his face.

If they're targeting Kumar, who could it be? Sneha left him on her own, and I never saw her return to his life. Maybe someone from Vijayawada? Or one of the girls from Dehradun—someone who didn't get his attention or was turned away by Nimisha?

But who would go this far—spending money and time just to split us apart?

Who wants him badly enough to orchestrate something like this?

Kumar said he would dig deep. With the backing of the police department—especially after the help he gave in busting Dolly's gang—they'd go to great lengths for him.

Let's see where this leads.

Scene 2: Discovering Pallavi

Later, Kumar came to my cabin and sat across from me. I looked up from the papers I was reviewing and finished reading before giving him my attention.

"I've found out who's behind this," he said.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"A name came up during interrogation—Pallavi. Her manager, Sudhakar, paid the money and gave Anwar our details."

"Pallavi?" I repeated. "That name sounds familiar, but I can't place it."

Kumar asked, "Do you know anyone named Pallavi from Vizag?"

"I've heard the name... but I can't recall where."

"We need to investigate quietly. Check with your friends, but don't tell them why. We don't want her to catch wind of our inquiries. They've already disconnected the phone number used to contact Rose."

I nodded, lost in thought. Pallavi... where had I heard that name?

Then, as if shifting gears, Kumar changed the topic.

"By the way, Bob gave me an update on the manufacturing company's capital structure. Based on that, I've divided the shares accordingly." He showed me the details of the share distribution.

Just then, my phone rang. It was from Hyderabad Hospital. Since the transporter installation, I had

become more involved in the hospital's operations. I gave instructions to my assistant and hung up.

"I need to visit the hospital tomorrow," I told him.

He nodded. "Return by the 22nd. While you're there, check on the printing of the wedding cards. Once you receive them, scan and send me a copy—I'll get my mom's approval. Dad might come down to distribute them to relatives. Arrange for a car for that."

Even as he spoke, my mind kept drifting back to Pallavi. Who was she? Why would she go to such lengths?

Then he said, "Loveleen and I are heading to the factory."

I nodded and arranged for transport to take them there.

Scene 3: Software, Strategy, and the USA

After finishing my work, I went to Kumar's cabin. I suddenly remembered that Dad had called earlier about a software project. A U.S.-based company that funds energy projects needed custom software. They handle billions in loans to power companies.

When Kumar had told me about Pallavi, I'd completely forgotten to mention it.

Still, the question haunted me—who *is* this Pallavi, and what does she want from us?

Kumar was seated comfortably, looking at me with quiet expectation.

"Dad mentioned a software requirement from a U.S. company that provides energy loans," I said. "He suggested you visit the U.S. to gather their requirements."

Kumar smiled. "Why travel all the way there for requirements? I've already built a prototype for them. I'll send them a copy by courier for approval."

I was surprised. "You developed software for a U.S. company already?"

He simply nodded. "In my free time."

"Alright," I said, "I'll get the address and courier details."

"Once they approve the prototype, we'll visit the U.S. to deliver the software and maybe tour the country a bit," he added.

I walked over, kissed him lightly, and said, "Best idea you've had all week."

"When is Praveen going back to the U.S.?"

"Next month. His wedding is fixed for December 26th."

"I'm thinking of sending a transporter unit to the U.S."

"Is that even possible? Won't there be legal issues?"

"I'll get Bob to arrange the necessary permissions."

"Let's go home," I said, and we left the office together.

At home, Kumar changed and sat at the dining table while I went to take a bath.

Scene 1: Ram & Nishitha's Wedding Reception

It was the day of Ram and Nishitha's wedding. The ceremony had concluded with pomp and gaiety, and by evening, the reception was underway at our bungalow. The venue was buzzing with activity as VIPs mingled, music played softly in the background, and a festive atmosphere enveloped us.

I stood beside the couple on stage, collecting gifts and keeping a careful record of them for future returns. When Mom and Dad arrived, Kumar brought them up and introduced them to

everyone. After the formalities, I called Kumar over for a group photo. Once the pictures were taken, he returned to the guests.

I noticed him escorting Mr. Reddy and Dad over to meet members of the investment consortium. After the introductions, Kumar returned.

“What happened?” I asked.

“They wanted to meet the consortium. I took them over.”

“How’s the company shaping up?”

“We’re expecting around ₹300 crores in investment right now.”

“Will that be enough for your expansion plans?”

“This will be the founders’ capital. If things go well, we plan to go public.”

“Won’t you lose control of the company that way?”

“Let’s see how it unfolds. Even Mr. Ambani retained control after going public. I’m preparing for what lies ahead—keeping in mind what those old sages in the Himalayas told me. They said I’d be ready for what’s coming. If I have to hand over management or lead it myself, I’m ready for either.”

Just then, Leena joined us.

“Daddy,” she said as she walked over.

“Sit with me. What’s the news?” Kumar asked.

“I heard Ram and Nishitha are leaving for Manali tonight?”

“Yes, I’m sending them there. Sunitha Auntie is managing a hotel there. You’ll go in the summer with your grandparents.”

“You’re not coming?”

“I couldn’t last time due to health issues, and now I might need to visit the U.S. for business. Don’t worry—I’ll come to visit.”

He added, “Where do you want to go to college? If you want to study abroad, I’ll plan that. But after your studies, I’d like you to manage the Lab.”

I gently tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to me, amused.

“I know,” he said. “She’ll be in research—just like the Leena from that other timeline.”

As dinner began, Leena’s mother called her over. I said, “Go ahead, grandma’s calling you for dinner.”

Kumar leaned toward me. “Can you get me a peg?”

I returned with two and handed him one.

“Where are your friends?” he asked. “No one seems to have come.”

“They went to Pranitha’s wedding.”

“Pranitha’s getting married and you didn’t tell me?”

“I did. You must’ve forgotten. I even showed you the card—you said it was nice.”

Later, after most VIPs had left, we sat down for dinner. Mom called me over—she wanted the *Garbhādhānam* ceremony performed before the couple left for Manali.

I returned to Kumar.

“Is everything done?” he asked.

“Yes, they’re ready to leave.”

Venkat, his cousin, asked, “Are they going by flight?”

“No,” Kumar said. “They’ll use the transporter. It’ll send them to Manali in a second.”

His cousin Ganesh was stunned. “What? In a second? How is that even possible?”

Kumar smiled. “It’s my latest invention. That’s why investors are lining up for our company. Come, let’s send them off.”

We all walked to the transporter room. Ram went in first, followed by Nishitha, and then their luggage. A few seconds later, I got a call—they had reached Manali safely and would call again the next day.

Scene 2: An Unexpected Visit

As I locked the transporter room and turned to go to the bedroom, Rose approached with two men.

"Madam," she said. "These men were looking for you."

I assumed it was about some pending payment.
"What can I help you with?"

The taller of the two said, "Pranila madam sent us. She asked us to bring you to Vizag."

"Who is Pranila? And what does she want from me?"

"She's Pranitha's younger sister," he said.
"You've really forgotten her?"

"I never met Pranitha's sister. Why would she want to see me?"

"She just wants to talk. She asked us to bring you to her."

"I can't just go suddenly like this."

The other man smirked. "You're talking like you don't have a machine that can take us to Vizag or the Lab instantly."

"Just open the door, madam," he added. "We'll go and be back in half an hour."

I hesitated. What game was Pranila playing? What did she want from me?

Finally, I relented. "Okay."

I opened the transporter room. The second man set the coordinates to Vizag and made me sit inside. I arrived in the Lab within seconds. Rose followed, then the tall man.

"Where's the other one?" I asked.

"He stayed back in Bombay. Come with us."

We exited. A security guard approached.

"Do you need a vehicle, madam?"

"Yes. Get us a jeep."

Moments later, a jeep arrived. We took it to the main road and then sent it back. Soon, a car arrived. The man motioned us inside and gave the driver instructions.

Scene 3: A Shocking Awakening

When I woke up, I was lying in a hospital bed.

I rang the bell. A nurse arrived.

"Good morning, madam. How are you feeling?"

"Why am I in a hospital?"

"You were found unconscious on a stretcher in the corridor. Did you have an accident?"

"I don't know. I was supposed to meet someone named Pranila. How did I end up here?"

The nurse lowered her voice. "Someone said you disappeared twenty-five years ago... and came back looking exactly the same."

My heart skipped a beat.

"What year is this?"

"2015."

I froze. *Twenty-five years?!*

"Where are my parents?"

"They passed away a few years ago. They never recovered from losing you. They placed the hospital in a trust, to be handed to you if you ever returned. But... you still look like you did back then. Where have you been?"

"I was in Bombay. I married the owner of a software company and worked with him for five years."

"But how did you return? Looking like this?"

"That's what I can't explain. Let me call him."

She handed me a mobile phone—Vivo. I asked, "Which network?"

"Airtel."

I dialed Kumar's office number. It said the number didn't exist.

“Can you help me find a company called Future India?”

She searched Google. “There’s no company by that name.”

“What about Kumar International?”

“No listings, madam.”

“Kumar Software Development in Bombay?”

“Still nothing.”

Where was Kumar? What had happened to him?
Did he even exist anymore?

“Maybe I need to go to Bombay. His parents might still be in Wadala.”

I tried to get out of bed. The nurse stopped me.

“Please stay. Let the doctor discharge you.”

“Who’s the hospital administrator?”

“Dr. Maithili Sharma.”

“Can you call her?”

“Right away.”

A while later, a doctor entered.

“I’m Maithili. How can I help you?”

“Were you classmates with Kumar—Reyansh Kumar—in the 10th standard?”

She raised an eyebrow. "Yes, I remember Reyansh. We were rivals for 1st rank. He got sick before the exams. But I never saw him after school."

"I don't know about Reyansh. But Kumar is my husband. He was a top industrialist in the country."

She frowned. "I've never heard of him."

"Do you know where I can find Reyansh?"

"I have no idea."

Just then, the nurse handed her some reports.

Dr. Maithili flipped through them and looked up, smiling.

"Congratulations, Nandini. You're three months pregnant."

I froze. My mouth went dry.

"Pregnant? Me?"

"You seem shocked. Aren't you happy?"

"I am... just not expecting it."

She placed a hand on my shoulder. "Take care. I'll check on you again later."

The nurse added, "Would you like to inform your husband?"

"I'm trying to. But apparently, he no longer exists. Or no one remembers him."

"That's impossible."

"No. What's impossible is that I just traveled 25 years into the future—and don't know how to get back."

Scene 1: Searching for Kumar — or Reyansh

I exhausted every possible resource trying to find Kumar—but he had vanished. There was no trace of him, or any of his companies. That's when it struck me—maybe I had ended up in an *alternate timeline*. If so, perhaps *Reyansh Kumar*—Kumar's alter ego—existed here.

But how to find him?

Kumar once said that Reyansh would likely be in software development. There are thousands—maybe lakhs—of software professionals in his age group. Estimating from Kumar's age, Reyansh would be around fifty now.

I started searching in Mumbai but couldn't locate him. After exhausting all leads there, I returned to Hyderabad. By then, I had given birth to twins—**Atul and Reena**—just as Kumar had once suggested.

It took nearly **five years** to track Reyansh down.

He had worked with various hospitals on hospital management software, but most had long forgotten him. Eventually, I traced his name to *Nawab's Hospital*. They still had his old contact, which turned out to be his daughter's number. She gave me his address, and I went straight there.

Scene 2: Finding Reyansh

His residence was modest. A few elderly women sat chatting near the gate. As I entered, one of them asked in Telugu, "**Whom do you want?**"

"I'm here to see **Reyansh**."

"You can go in—his door is never locked," she said.

I pushed the door open slowly. The room was dimly lit, but I could make out his figure lying on the bed.

"Who is it?" he asked weakly.

I stepped closer. "Don't you recognize me, Reyansh?"

"I'm sorry... my eyesight is failing. Who are you?"

"I'm **Nandini**—your pen friend."

He tried to sit up. "Nandini? You... left me heartbroken years ago. How are you still so young?"

"I found anti-aging medicine," I smiled. "Come with me, and I'll give it to you."

"What do I need anti-aging for? Who would I live for?"

"You can live for me," I said softly and held his hand. He sat up, took a walking stick, and leaned on me.

As we walked out, I told the woman near the gate, "I'm taking him to our hospital."

"You have a hospital?" she asked, surprised.

"Yes—**Rao's Hospital** is ours."

I helped him into the waiting car and we drove away.

Scene 3: Recovery and Revelation

At the hospital, I placed him in a private ward. I instructed the doctors to give him the best possible care. The saying goes: *When a queen commands, miracles happen.*

Two days later, he was feeling better.

"Thank you for saving my life," he said. "Had you not come, I don't know what would've happened."

"Don't thank me—it was selfishness," I replied.

"Why?"

“Because I’m not the Nandini you knew in 1984. I’m Kumar’s wife from another timeline.”

He blinked. “Which timeline?”

“Most people would’ve asked *what is a timeline*, but you asked *which*—so you know?”

“I know a lot. I’ve written several books on timelines. As per my knowledge, there were seven timelines. Some ended after 2020. A few still exist—Kumar who became a Swamiji, and the one who became a top industrialist, venturing into space technology.”

“That’s my husband—the industrialist. I didn’t know he went into space tech.”

“He recently travelled to Mars, met with Indrasen, and secured a \$10 billion grant.”

“What else do you know about him?”

“After you disappeared, he married **Loveleen** and had a son—**Dhruv**.”

I remembered Kumar once saying, *Loveleen will get Dhruv*. So that was their son. It suddenly made sense.

“What else?” I pressed.

“I don’t think I should reveal more. I’m documenting everything. Once the books are published, you can read them.”

“Fair enough. But I want to know **your** story.”

Before he could speak, a nurse entered.
“Madam, someone is waiting in your cabin.”

“I’ll listen to your story next time,” I said and left.

Scene 4: Reyansh's Story

Two days later, I returned with Atul and Reena—now five years old—and took them to meet Reyansh.

“These are my twins,” I said. “And this is your uncle—your dad’s elder brother. He looked just like him when he was thirty.”

The kids chatted with him a while before I sent them home with the driver.

Now it was just me and Reyansh.

“Tell me,” I said. “Why did your life go in a different direction, while others became Swamijis, industrialists, scientists?”

He sighed.

“My downfall began when I came to Hyderabad after my mother passed away. My father died just after my marriage. After my mother’s death, with no one left in Mumbai—and at my wife’s insistence—we shifted to Hyderabad.”

“I was working as EDP in-charge at a Paints company, but it went into lockdown due to labor issues. Simultaneously, we lost our house. We

were living in a single room with a family, and my wife Anita had a disagreement with the landlord's wife. We had to vacate."

"In Hyderabad, I struggled to get a job. I worked with Bombay-based clients who had operations here. I briefly worked for GVK for a meager salary. I returned to Mumbai, collected my dues from the Paints company, and closed my PF account."

"By the time I came back, my bank account had been emptied by my father-in-law. With no funds and Anita pregnant, I moved into my in-laws' home."

He paused.

"Eventually, I joined JK Industries as a software programmer. I finished the project in six months, but with no raise, I shifted to hospital software, working with a company tied to Yashoda Hospitals."

At that moment, I interjected.

"I dreamt about this—you got diabetes and needed open-heart surgery. I dreamt you had that surgery in our hospital. But where did you actually get it?"

"I had it done for free at Yashoda—they billed me nominally, then wrote it off. Later, I worked with another hospital. When I saw they didn't respect me, I quit. I joined a software firm on a

project basis. At one point, I had two clients and one project. When the project ended, I lost the other two as well.”

“Desperate, I went to Noida for a job. But after six months, I was laid off. That was the first time I ever lost a job—and nothing stable came after that.”

“Why didn’t Anita stay with you?”

He took a deep breath.

“One day, I was in the bathroom. I came out with a towel, looking for clothes in the cupboard. Anita had gone to her relative’s and returned, pushing the door open. I didn’t even know it was shut.”

“She walked in and stood frozen. I turned to her—and then saw her sister, **Sugandha**, on the other side of the bed, holding her saree like she’d just dressed in a hurry.”

“I stood stunned. Anita walked out. Sugandha tossed the saree on the bed and left too. She had been fully dressed—it was a setup.”

“Why?”

“Sugandha was angry at Anita for not letting her use our car. I think she wanted to punish her—using me.”

“I’ve been depressed since then. No money. No work. And no one.”

Scene 5: The Dream and Sugandha

“Do you think Sugandha had feelings for you?”

“No. She always looked down on me—like I wasn’t worthy of her attention. I never imagined she’d stoop to this. But maybe she had a grudge against Anita.”

“I once had a dream,” I told him. “I walked into my bedroom and found Kumar with Loveleen in a compromising position. I asked him to choose between us. He chose me, and we decided to move to Hyderabad. But everything that happened next matched your life. When I saw him in surgery, I woke up.”

“But why did I dream *your* life—with *Loveleen* involved? Do you have a photo of Sugandha?”

“I think I saved one on my external hard disk. It has all my work and personal files.”

“I’ve moved your belongings to my house—let’s look.”

Scene 6: Looking into the Past

Once Reyansh was discharged, I brought him to stay on the ground floor of my house. I and the kids lived upstairs.

One Sunday, we went to the storeroom and dug out his belongings. He found a white external hard drive and its cables.

Back in the hall, I connected it to a laptop. We opened a folder full of old photographs.

I paused on one. "Sugandha is beautiful," I said. "But she doesn't resemble Loveleen. Why did my mind replace her with Loveleen in my dream?"

"Maybe Sugandha had hidden feelings. Or maybe you were subconsciously connecting her situation to Loveleen's."

I nodded, then noticed another folder.

"What are all these?"

"My life's work—software projects I've written over the years."

"You've done so much," I said, scrolling through the code. "Even if the world didn't recognize it—you made your mark."

Scene 1: A New Beginning – "DateorWed" and a Software Partnership

I was browsing through the list of folders on Reyansh's hard drive and read aloud, "Hospital Software, TPA Software, Water Billing, Telecom Marketing, Invoicing System, Seeds

Manufacturing, R&D, B2B Portal, B2C Portal, Vista... DateorWed. What's this 'DateorWed'?"

Reyansh smiled. "That's software I developed for people looking to date and eventually get married."

"Something like our Pan India Matrimonial Application?"

"What's that?" he asked.

"My husband designed a system for a courier company using his data transfer technology. It worked like this: branches across India would collect data of brides or grooms, and at the end of the day, everything was uploaded and shared via phone modems."

Reyansh raised his brows. "That's old-school. Now we have the internet. With a server and browser-based access, the data can be fed, stored, and accessed instantly."

An idea clicked. "Why don't we start a software firm together? I've worked alongside my husband for over five years selling software. I can handle marketing and sales. You can focus on installations and support."

"But I don't have any money," he said.

"You don't need money. You have code—and that's worth more than capital. You've

developed so much already. Let me handle the rest.”

He looked at me for a moment, then nodded. “Okay. Let’s do it.”

Scene 2: The Phone Call – A Ghost from the Past

A few weeks later, Reyansh sat alone in his office when his phone rang. The caller ID displayed a name he hadn’t seen in over a year: **Anita**—his wife, who had walked out on him.

Cautiously, he answered.

Anita spoke first. “Sugandha called me. She confessed. She played a prank on you. You had no idea she was even in the room. She never expected me to leave you—and now, she wants to apologize.”

Reyansh remained silent.

“She had problems at home and consulted her *Guruji*. He told her that her actions weren’t pranks—they were malicious. He warned her that karma would catch up with her. Her daughter was recently in an accident. Guruji told her unless she sought forgiveness and returned what she took, tragedy would follow.”

“What did she take?” Reyansh asked sharply.

“Property. Cash. She siphoned off our resources using... black magic.”

“Since when?”

“Since we moved to Hyderabad. You always said Hyderabad was bad luck. It wasn’t the place—it was them. Your talent was exploited. Guruji said you have a guardian angel now—someone who saved you.”

Anita paused. “When I went to your room, the landlady said you had left. What happened?”

“I was in a terrible state,” Reyansh replied. “Nandini found me, admitted me to her hospital, then gave me a room at her house. We started a software company together.”

“We’ll come to meet you,” Anita said. “The hospital is nearby.”

Scene 3: A Twisted Apology

Anita and Sugandha arrived at the hospital and were escorted to Reyansh’s office. Nandini joined them shortly after.

Anita gestured to her sister. “Sugandha has something to say.”

All eyes turned to Sugandha.

"I'm so sorry for what I did. I want to cleanse myself of the evil I've done to you. I brought property documents and bank details."

She placed a folder on the desk.

Reyansh opened it—only to find blank sheets and newspaper scraps.

He looked up at her.

Sugandha burst out laughing. "What did you think? That I'd return everything just like that? This is your so-called angel?" she sneered at Nandini. "Let's see what she can do. I'll spend every rupee I have, but I won't give you a single one."

Anita stood up, her voice trembling. "Why are you doing this, Akka? What did I do to you? Did I ask you to apologize? Why humiliate me? Did you have feelings for my husband? Or was this just about breaking us apart?"

Sugandha's expression turned bitter. "I hated him. I hated *you*. I hated sharing my parents with you. You were always Dad's favorite. I was nothing to him."

Anita shot back, "And you were always Mama's darling. Why did you keep pushing Mom and Dad away then?"

Sugandha hurled the fake documents at Reyansh and stormed out.

Scene 4: Karma Comes Calling

A few minutes later, Anita returned, shaken. "Sugandha... met with an accident. She's being wheeled into surgery."

Nandini quickly instructed the staff to take her to the operating theatre. Reyansh, Anita, and Nandini rushed to the emergency wing.

Scene 5: Family Secrets Unfold

Soon after, Sugandha's husband, **Venkateswarulu**, and their daughters, **Deepti** and **Priya**, arrived.

"What happened?" Venky asked.

"She was hit outside the hospital," Anita explained. "Reyansh is working here, so the administrator gave the green light for surgery."

"But why was she here?" Deepti asked.

"She told us she was going to visit her *Guruji*," Priya replied.

Anita's eyes narrowed. "Did she mention she was coming here?"

Deepti shook her head.

Priya turned to Anita. "But what's going on? Why did she need to apologize to uncle?"

Anita sighed. “Sugandha once created a scene to break my marriage. She staged a setup, making it look like she and Reyansh were having an affair. I fell for it—and left him. But she just admitted it was a prank.”

Venky opened the folder Sugandha had left. “It’s all blank.”

Anita turned to Deepti. “Why are you staying with your parents now?”

Deepti hesitated. “My husband is having an affair—with Tanmay’s wife.”

Anita shook her head. “That doesn’t sound like him.”

Reyansh thought silently. *Why would Sugandha break her own daughter’s marriage? Could it be karma looping back?*

Scene 6: The Web of Deceit

Reyansh invited Anita and Nandini to his cabin, leaving Sugandha’s family in the waiting area.

He explained, “Deepti married into a close relative’s family. Tanmay is her uncle’s son. The woman she’s accusing is his wife. Sugandha always disliked their closeness and may have planted the idea of an affair.”

Anita added, "Some relatives told me what happened. During a birthday celebration, things escalated. Sugandha accused Deepti's husband in front of others. Then, after pretending to resolve things, she called everyone back, claiming he'd abused her that night—though she wasn't even in the same room."

"They took Deepti home, saying she needed rest. Two days later, Sugandha sent the gold and cash with Venky. It was planned."

Nandini asked, "So they staged everything just to get her out with all the valuables?"

"It looks that way."

She asked, "But what does that have to do with you and Reyansh?"

Anita sighed. "Sugandha always targeted me. With Mom's support, she got away with everything. When we came to Hyderabad, our financial troubles began. Then Kumar got a hospital project and a car for work. That's when jealousy brewed. She used black magic and deceit to sap us dry."

Scene 7: Reflections

Nandini sat back, stunned.
"So all of this—Sugandha's schemes, the black

magic, the sabotage—it was all because of her jealousy?”

Anita nodded. “She couldn’t stand to see others happy. She targeted us—and now karma is catching up.”

Reyansh looked quietly at Nandini, grateful.

He finally spoke. “Whatever the reason... your arrival changed my life.”

Scene 1: A Conversation of Connections

“I’ve realized something,” I said, looking at Anita. “Sugandha is the kind of person who always wants things her way—regardless of the consequences.”

Anita nodded thoughtfully. “How long have you been running this hospital?”

“About five years now,” I replied.

“And before that?” she asked.

“I completed hospital administration in the U.S. After returning, I helped manage my father’s hospital. That’s when I met my husband—at his sister’s wedding. My father had asked me to assist their family since they were from Bombay. We connected instantly. I helped him develop hospital software. Our families arranged our marriage. After the wedding, I moved to Bombay

and supported his software company. In 2014, I returned here to take over the hospital.”

“So,” Anita asked cautiously, “you left your husband in Bombay to run the hospital?”

“I didn’t leave him,” I clarified. “He sent me to Hyderabad to manage it.”

“Then what’s your interest in Reyansh?” she asked, lowering her voice.

“He’s a link to my husband,” I said honestly.

“What do you mean?”

“My husband is... unreachable. But when I interact with Reyansh, he receives the messages. It took me four years to find him. I searched across Bombay and through software companies but couldn’t trace him. Eventually, through my hospital connections, I located him here in Hyderabad—in terrible condition, especially after COVID. I brought him to our hospital, got him treated, and offered him a room at our home.”

Anita looked at me skeptically. “Who lives with you?”

“I have twins—a boy and a girl, Atul and Reena. They’re five now.”

“But how can you send messages through my husband?” she asked.

"If I told you, you wouldn't understand."

"Try me," she said softly.

"I came from another timeline. I time-traveled twenty years into the future."

Anita blinked. "You're right. I don't understand."

Reyansh, who had been silent, finally said, "That explains why you still look so young."

Anita turned to him sharply. "Do you even know her?"

"She claims to be my pen friend from the 1980s," he replied calmly.

"So, you just *assume* she time-traveled and somehow ended up being your pen friend?" she asked, skeptical.

I stepped in, "He's not *my* pen friend. I had no interaction with him until I came looking for him."

"Alright," Anita sighed. "I don't mind you being friends. But how much are you paying him for the hospital software?"

"Don't worry about money," I replied. "I know you've had financial struggles. If this upcoming client finalizes the deal, all your problems will be behind you."

She turned to Reyansh. "Are you coming home?"

“You go ahead,” he said. “I’ll come later.”

Anita left, visibly upset.

I asked him, “Why did you say that?”

“You know how she walked out on me—after more than twenty years of marriage. Why should I worry about her feelings now?”

“You seem calm, even detached,” I noted.

“I’ve had to be. When she left, I had nothing. No job. No money. No respect. She didn’t think twice.”

Just then, an announcement called me to the OT. I stood and left.

Scene 2: Sugandha’s Awakening

Reyansh had been checking on Sugandha daily. She’d been in a coma for two days. When her husband, Venky, visited, Reyansh asked, “Where are your daughters?”

Venky looked flustered, evasive. Reyansh suspected something was wrong—but it wasn’t his concern. Sugandha, however, was under their hospital’s care. She was his responsibility.

That day, Sugandha’s expression—despite being unconscious—turned disturbing. Her face contorted. Then her body started to move erratically.

Reyansh rushed to get a nurse. Seeing the violent movement, the nurse fetched a doctor.

He went to Nandini's cabin.

A nurse soon arrived. "Madam, your patient is out of her coma."

"What?" I asked. "How did it happen?"

"No idea," she said.

We hurried to her room. Reyansh stood beside me. Sugandha stared at him with intense, hateful eyes, trying to speak but unable to form words.

Reyansh offered a cool smile. "Awake, are we?"

She glared at him. I asked the nurse to check her vitals—normal. She'd recover quickly.

"Did you inform her family?" I asked.

"I tried her daughters. Phones are off. Her husband didn't answer either," she replied.

"She hasn't seen her daughters in five days," Reyansh noted.

Sugandha's expression turned anxious.

Reyansh added, "Maybe her daughter went back to her in-laws."

Sugandha tried to speak again. The nurse leaned in but couldn't decipher the sounds.

Suddenly, Venky entered.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Sugandha’s regained consciousness,” the nurse replied.

Instead of relief, fear crossed his face.

“She’s asking about your daughters,” Reyansh said.

Venky hesitated, then sighed. “I took a ₹10 lakh loan through an app. They started demanding repayment. I had lent the money to several people, but they’re not repaying quickly. They’ve taken our daughters as collateral.”

“What?” Reyansh exclaimed. “When?”

“Six days ago.”

“You didn’t go to the police?”

“They warned me not to.”

“You’re insane,” Reyansh said. “It might be too late now.” He paced, furious, then took out his phone.

He called his sister Revathi to get the number of a relative—Tanmay’s father. After a quick explanation, the man promised to help.

Within 30 minutes, **Tanmay** and **Sandesh** (Deepti’s husband) arrived at the hospital. Reyansh took them to his office.

Scene 3: Secrets and Accusations

After briefing them, Sandesh spoke. “When Deepti left, she took all her gold. I heard Venky sold it all and lent the money. Why did he need a loan?”

“How much would that gold have fetched?” Reyansh asked.

“₹25 to ₹30 lakhs,” Sandesh replied.

Tanmay interjected, “What happened to your aunt? Why is she hospitalized?”

“She had an accident outside the hospital,” Reyansh said. “But before that, she came to ‘apologize.’”

“Apologize? For what?” Sandesh asked.

“She staged a prank. Made it look like I was having an affair with her. It caused Anita to leave me. She claimed it was a joke—but came here just to mock me again, throwing blank papers in my face. As she left, she got hit by a vehicle.”

Sandesh’s face hardened. “She’s twisted. I noticed her slowly poisoning Deepti’s mind. She said I was having an affair with Tanmay’s wife. Can you imagine? She’s like a sister to me. Deepti stopped helping around the house. Stayed in her room all day. Shut me out after pregnancy.”

At that moment, Anita walked in and overheard.

Reyansh gestured for her to sit. “There’s more. Venky used his daughters as loan collateral.”

Anita gasped.

Scene 4: The Cost of Deceit

Deepti had returned to her husband recently, but the damage Sugandha caused had far-reaching consequences. Sugandha’s manipulations, jealousy, and obsession with control had finally brought ruin—to herself and her family.

Reyansh turned to Nandini. “What began with one woman’s lies became a chain of broken relationships. But now, the truth is out.”

Anita nodded. “And karma has begun to answer.”

Scene 1: Recovery and Recognition

Sugandha remained in the hospital for three months. Though her condition improved physically, her voice never returned. The doctors explained that the accident had damaged a part of her brain responsible for speech. Upon discharge, she communicated by writing—either on a slate or through her mobile.

During this period, I used my network in the hospital industry to secure a new software contract for Reyansh. The hospital wanted both the product and the source code. After several rounds of negotiation, I closed the deal at ₹50 lakhs.

In addition, I sold **DateorWed**, his dating-and-marriage software, to a major matrimonial company for ₹1 crore.

Reyansh—Kumar—was finally flush with funds.

Deepti reconciled with her husband and returned to his home. Meanwhile, Venky took refuge at his in-laws' house while Sugandha remained hospitalized. He attempted to recover the money he'd loaned out, but only the smaller borrowers repaid. The rest kept asking for more time.

Thanks to efforts from **Pranay** and **Sandesh**, Venky was granted partial relief to begin repaying his loan app debts.

However, when he approached Sugandha for the **land documents** to clear the remaining dues, she flatly refused.

Scene 2: The Birthday That Wasn't

It was my birthday. The hospital staff had arranged a small party in the lounge.

I brought Reyansh along.

The celebrations were warm and heartfelt, but as the crowd dispersed, I was overwhelmed by a creeping sense of emptiness. I remembered my last birthday with Kumar—the one where he'd arranged a surprise party and invited all my friends. It had been the happiest day of my life.

And possibly the beginning of my fate.

As the memories flooded in, I felt tears forming. The weight of the years, the timelines, the unanswered questions—I broke down.

I grabbed Reyansh's arm and cried into his shoulder.

He pulled me close gently, trying to console me. In that moment, I saw *Kumar* in his face. I leaned in and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

But Reyansh didn't take advantage of the moment. Instead, he responded with tenderness—placing a kiss on my forehead.

When we reached home, the driver pulled up at the portico. Reyansh helped me out of the car and guided me to my room. I sat down on the bed, emotionally drained.

"Don't leave," I whispered.

"I'll just change and come back. You change too," he said gently, stepping out.

I changed into my nightwear and waited. When Reyansh returned, he'd changed into a clean set of clothes and pulled up a chair beside my bed. He held my hand.

I looked into his eyes. All I saw was concern. And something else—something he had buried deeply.

Tears welled up in mine again.

Scene 3: Questions of the Heart

"What's the latest with Kumar?" I asked, trying to read his expression.

He looked at me, blankly at first.

"I know you receive updates from all timelines," I said. "I've read your books."

"But your timeline," he said, "is incomplete. I haven't documented the ending."

"You didn't want to tell me because... Kumar married Loveleen."

Reyansh sighed. "We've passed 2020. I no longer receive signals from your timeline. There's no need for me to stay anymore."

"There *is* a need," I replied softly. "Maybe I'm selfish. But I want you here—for me, and for the children. Atul and Reena should grow up around someone who reminds them of their father. And

you give me strength—until the day I can return to Kumar.”

“You must miss him very much.”

I paused. “Not as much as I thought I would. Because you’re here.”

Reyansh stood to leave. “Then... good night.”

As I tried to follow him, my nightgown tangled around my ankle. I stumbled forward.

He caught me instinctively, hands firm on my shoulders.

I looked up. This time, his concern softened into something else.

For a brief moment, I saw it—the *love* he’d hidden so well.

Scene 4: Echoes of a Broken Past

I remembered what he’d written in his manuscript—the story of how **Nandini** from his timeline had left him. He had come to Hyderabad briefly to collect his CA degree. She misunderstood the visit. Rumors, misunderstandings, and the influence of his in-laws made her walk away from him without hearing his side.

In one handwritten chapter, describing her death, the ink was smudged by tears. He had loved her deeply.

She had been his first love. His unreachable dream.

I wondered—what would I have done in her place? Would I have given him a chance to explain? Would I have believed the worst?

My thoughts were interrupted as Reyansh steadied me. I instinctively placed my hand on his shoulder.

For the first time, he didn't look away.

He leaned forward and kissed me—not on the lips, but gently, again, on the forehead.

And I understood.

His love wasn't about possession or desire.

It was about presence.

I reached out and pulled Reyansh gently toward me. My lips brushed his cheek—closer to the corner of his mouth this time.

He closed his eyes, his body giving a small, involuntary shiver—as if caught in a sudden chill.

I leaned in again. This time, I kissed him on the mouth.

He responded softly, tentatively, returning the kiss with a gentleness that mirrored mine. I lowered my hands, wrapped my arms around him, and hugged him tightly.

At last, something shifted in him. He placed his arms around me, his embrace warm, tender... present. As if he had finally allowed himself to feel the love I had offered in silence for so long.

I don't know what he was thinking at that moment, but for me—it brought back a wave of memory. I remembered the first time I brought Kumar to my house, under the pretext of working together on software. That same nervous anticipation. That same electricity in the air.

I held Reyansh for a long time, letting the silence speak. Letting his nearness fill the void I'd lived with for years. His presence didn't erase the past—it softened it.

And for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel alone.

I woke up, groggy and disoriented. The soft light from the window filtered through the curtains. I realized I was in my innerwear, and Reyansh lay sleeping beside me, his chest gently rising under the sheet.

Curious and unsure, I reached under the blanket—he wore only briefs.

Memories of the previous night were hazy. I recalled hugging him tightly... and then a feeling of weightlessness, as if floating. At one point, it felt like I had died and gone to heaven. Then—nothing. Just sleep.

I didn't feel as though we had sex—at least not penetrative sex. There was no soreness, no trace of intimacy of that kind.

So, what exactly happened?

I rose, slipped into my nightdress, and walked to the kitchen to make coffee. The routine helped settle my nerves.

When the coffee was ready, I returned to the room and gently woke Reyansh. He stirred, sat up against the headboard, and accepted the cup I offered.

I sat beside him, sipping quietly.

He stared ahead at the wall, avoiding my eyes. He looked withdrawn—almost ashamed. Was he feeling guilty? But why should he?

His wife had left long ago. My husband was unreachable, possibly lost to me forever. We were two people surviving in borrowed time.

“Reyansh,” I asked softly, “what happened last night?”

He turned to me slowly. "You don't remember?"

"Not clearly. I remember kissing you... and you kissed me back. Then everything's a blur."

He paused, then said, "You slowly took off my t-shirt and your nightdress. You kissed me... everywhere. When I tried to reciprocate, you removed your innerwear and asked me to kiss you all over. Then we lay down... and slept. That's all."

"So... nothing happened?"

"How could I go further? We're both married."

"Does that matter anymore? I've been away from Kumar for over six years. He's remarried, has a child. Your wife left you. Even when she asked you to return, you didn't."

"I didn't return because I made a vow," he said. "I wanted to bring her to a house of our own. I've already bought land and construction is almost finished. I'll bring her back once it's ready."

"So that's what's holding you back from me? I know you love me—I've seen it in your eyes. I've read your manuscript. I know how devastated you were when the Nandini from this timeline left you."

He lowered his gaze. "It was my mistake. I didn't try to explain. When I finally called her, I

assumed she'd already moved on. I felt unworthy of chasing her."

"You were never unworthy," I said. "You worked your way up to become a respected software professional—despite everything. You fought your way through setbacks and rebuilt yourself."

"At the time, I was just a man with broken dreams. I failed CA, barely finished B.Com, and missed a year due to injury. What would you have done in her place?"

"I'm not her," I replied. "I loved Kumar, despite his flaws. And I can see how different this Nandini's life might've been had she not rejected you."

He stayed quiet. I continued, "She didn't study further. Didn't help her father. She became ill from bad habits and eventually had a heart attack. Maybe that's when Bob's people replaced her in my timeline."

"You've always been more disciplined," he said. "But you know why I had health issues—someone targeted us after we moved to Hyderabad."

"Yes, I know. But even with all that, I still think this Nandini's life would've been better had she accepted you."

He gave a half-hearted smile.

“So now, are you really going back to your family?” I asked.

“When the house is ready,” he confirmed. “They’ll accept me. I have money now.”

I nodded slowly. “Alright, enough soul-searching for one morning. We need to get ready—the hospital admin from another clinic is visiting to review the software.”

He got up. “Okay, I’ll go to my room.”

“Or,” I said, teasingly, “we could shower together?”

He looked at me with surprise. “After everything we just talked about, you ask *that*?”

“A girl can still have expectations,” I said with a soft smile.

He hesitated for a moment... then nodded. “If you say so, let’s do it.”

I smiled—he’d finally let go of the hesitation.

I grabbed a towel and walked toward the bathroom.

He followed.

Chapter 9

1st January 2021

Reyansh and I were seated in my office, reviewing the hospital's operations when an attender entered and said, "Madam, some visitors have come to meet you. One of them says his name is Bob. He claims to have important information for you."

I looked at Reyansh, surprised. "Send them in," I replied, my heart skipping a beat.

The name *Bob* stirred many memories. Robert Fernandes—code-named Bob—was the one who had originally transported me into this timeline. I had met him once before, during a visit he made with Dimitri. I hoped this visit would finally bring news of Kumar.

But it wasn't Bob who walked through the door.

Instead, a stranger entered and sat beside Reyansh. His manner was calm, composed—but clearly official.

"Who are you?" I asked, startled. "Where is Bob?"

The man looked at me and said, "Bob sent me. I have a message regarding your husband. You have exactly one week to prepare and clear your affairs. After that, you will be taken to reunite with him."

I had expected more—an explanation, perhaps, or a sign that Kumar had received the many emotional messages I'd relayed through Reyansh. Still, I knew Kumar had felt my presence in some way. Reyansh kept a record of every timeline Kumar connected with and shared them with me—often publishing the finished stories on platforms like Amazon and Notion Press India.

From those stories, I learned that Kumar had met with Indrasen and begun developing a spaceship. Recently, he completed its construction and shifted it to Sriharikota.

I turned to Reyansh. "Would you look after the hospital while I'm gone?" I asked.

He agreed without hesitation.

I contacted our legal team and began transferring operational control of the hospital to him.

A Week Later

Bob finally came in person.

Seeing him triggered a wave of emotion. "Why did you do this?" I demanded. "Why did you send me to another timeline—away from my husband?"

Bob remained composed. "It was necessary," he said. "For the larger purpose. For God's work. But now, it's time to reunite you both. We've established a base on the Moon—a secured underground bunker where timelines will be merged."

He turned to Reyansh. "You must come with us too. We can't risk leaving you behind."

"I'm not prepared for something like this," Reyansh said, visibly alarmed.

"You don't need to be," Bob reassured him. "You'll be returned safely, in one piece."

Given the circumstances, I amended the documents again—stipulating that if Reyansh were unavailable, the hospital would be handed over to his daughters, Leena and Rashmi.

With everything signed, we left with Bob's associate.

He led us into a cylindrical, lift-like structure. Moments later, we descended—or ascended; it was hard to tell. We emerged into a large underground chamber with a faint lunar gravity that made each movement feel surreal.

The room was divided into eight partitions, most already filled with people. Bob's team escorted more in, placing each group carefully into their respective sectors.

A few minutes later, a young Punjabi woman was escorted into our section. She looked strikingly familiar.

I smiled and said, "Hi, Loveleen. How are you?"

She blinked in confusion. "Do I know you?"

I realized then—this wasn't *my* Loveleen. This version of her must've come from another timeline. She looked no older than 25.

"Ah... sorry. I must have mistaken you for someone else," I said, recovering quickly. "What do you do?"

"I'm studying law in London," she replied. "Working as a junior advocate. These people just... took me. I think I was kidnapped."

"I doubt that," I said gently. "They likely asked you to come—nicely."

"Call it what you want," she muttered. "So who are you?"

"I'm Nandini. My husband—Kumar—is supposed to be here somewhere. This is Reyansh. He looks like Kumar but is older. A different version, from another timeline."

We chatted like strangers caught in unusual circumstances. Then the chamber lights dimmed, and an announcement echoed:

“Timeline merger process initiated.”

A soft humming filled the room. When the lights returned, several individuals from the other partitions were gone.

We looked around in silence.

The merger had begun.

We watched in silence as individuals were escorted out from the other partitions, one group at a time. Ours was the last.

First, Loveleen was taken from our section.

Then they called me. I gathered Atul and Reena close and followed the escorts out. We were led down a narrow corridor into another section of the lunar facility.

Reyansh was the last to be taken.

Inside the examination room, technicians fitted us with strange devices—like headphones wired into a larger console. Each of us was scanned: me, the children, and finally Reyansh.

After the evaluation, we were escorted to a large command hall. Bob stood at the center, waiting.

In the room were two Kumars. One was older—perhaps around 40 years of age—standing beside Loveleen and their son Dhruv. Another, younger version of Kumar stood quietly near the

back. Several others were present, though their faces were unfamiliar to me.

Bob began to speak.

“Each of you will have a specific role in the new phase we’re about to enter. The older Kumar will oversee the selection and launch of the interplanetary mission. He will lead the team into space, accompanied by Loveleen and Dhruv.

Nandini,” he turned to me, “you and your children will be relocated to New York, out of reach of those who may still be hunting you. You’ll be given new identities and a safe life there.”

I nodded slowly. Somehow, I had always known Kumar would have a larger destiny. Mine, it seemed, was to step aside—at least for now—and protect our children.

Bob continued.

“Reyansh,” he said, turning to him, “you will also be sent to New York. A select group will accompany you, and their safety and wellbeing will be your responsibility. This includes overseeing the children’s education, their security, and the continuity of our mission on Earth.”

Reyansh raised a hand. “Who will be coming with me?”

Bob listed the names carefully:

- **Revathi**, your sister, and her daughter **Shravani**
- **Sunitha** and her daughter **Anjali**
- **Loveleen** and **Dhruv** – from a timeline where they were divorced
- **Joy** – daughter of Kumar and Loveleen
- **Molly** and her daughter **Simran**

He looked Reyansh in the eye.

“They are your responsibility now. We are trusting you with their safety and integration. This group must remain under the radar. No contact with anyone outside the approved circle.”

Reyansh’s face tightened slightly.

Bob added, more firmly this time:

“Especially—no contact with Anita or your daughters. Any compromise could jeopardize all timelines involved.”

We were quietly transported to New York and assigned to a new residence under our altered identities. A mid-sized medical equipment business was entrusted to us, functioning both

as a cover and a legitimate source of income. We were told to manage it with complete discretion.

The silence of our new lives was both a relief and a weight. Cut off from the past, from loved ones left behind, we clung to each other like scattered stars in an unfamiliar sky—watching, waiting, building something new while the universe quietly rearranged itself.

We had been in New York for several weeks now.

The apartment we were assigned was comfortable—quiet and spacious, located in a secured building where others from our group also lived. On one side of the hallway was the kids' room, and on the other, Reyansh's. Mine was in the middle, and though we shared connecting doors, I had never used them—until now.

I had only caught a fleeting glimpse of Kumar at the moon base before we were separated. I had assumed—perhaps foolishly—that the timeline merger would bring us back together. That once all the chaos subsided, we would be a family again.

But he never came.

They said it was for our safety. That Kumar was being sent to Mars with the spaceship team. That

contact was not allowed. That he had responsibilities beyond us now.

But how could I explain this to our children, who had barely spoken to their father since arriving in this new reality? Who knew him only through stories, memories, and the way Reyansh—who looked so much like him—would gently care for them?

Reyansh had stepped into their lives with quiet grace. He looked after their studies, made sure they felt safe, and shielded them from the weight of what we'd all left behind. He had been more of a father to them than I could have ever asked for—but he never once crossed the line.

Despite leaving behind his own family, he had kept a respectful distance. I knew he carried deep scars from his past, particularly from his breakup with the Nandini of his timeline. Those wounds hadn't healed, and it seemed he'd built walls he didn't want anyone to breach—even me.

But tonight, I couldn't help it.

The weight of absence pressed hard on my chest. I longed for Kumar—his voice, his arms, his warmth. And it hurt even more that I had no way to reach him. He was somewhere between planets now, unreachable, untouchable.

I sat alone on the edge of my bed, the sound of the city filtering through the windows. A familiar feeling began to settle in—dark, hollow despair. The same feeling I had before Kumar first rescued me from myself back in my original timeline. The same storm that once led me to him.

Now, with no one else to turn to, I stood, walked across the room, and paused at the connecting door to Reyansh's room.

I reached for the handle.

It had never been opened before. A silent, invisible line had always existed between us—one neither of us dared cross.

But tonight, I needed to cross it.

I turned the knob slowly and stepped inside.

What I saw, he was masturbating in his bed. Seeing me, he covered himself with a bedsheet.

I walked into Reyansh's room quietly, the dim lights casting long shadows across the walls. He was already in bed, resting against the headboard, lost in thought.

I sat beside him, gently.

He turned to look at me, his eyes calm but unreadable.

"I'm feeling low," I whispered, "depressed. I just... needed some companionship tonight."

He didn't respond immediately. But after a long moment, he moved to the side, making space for me on the bed.

It felt like an invitation. Perhaps finally, he was letting me in—closer, not just emotionally but physically. My heart raced, not just from hope but from the weight of all the nights spent missing Kumar, alone in grief.

I slipped under the bedsheet beside him, my skin brushing his. He was warm. Familiar. A steady presence.

He turned slightly and kissed me gently on the forehead.

"Go to sleep," he murmured. "You'll feel better tomorrow."

I lay still, eyes wide open in the dark.

Was that it?

Did he not understand why I'd come? Did he think I simply needed comforting words—when in truth, I was aching for his closeness, craving intimacy, not just warmth?

Maybe he didn't want to cross that line.

Maybe he couldn't.

And then I remembered—he had covered himself quickly when I entered. I could feel it, beneath the sheets. He wasn't clothed.

He was naked—yet still, he had chosen restraint.

His silence wasn't rejection.

It was respect.

But still, I wondered—how long would he keep holding back?

So, I put my hand on his groin area and handled his penis. By my touch, it sprang up. If he does not have feelings for me, why would he react like that?

Seeing me handling him, he pulled me close and kissed me on the mouth. I responded by kissing back. It was as if I found my long-lost love. I don't know what I felt, I felt like we transferred to 1987 like in one of his books. He made passionate love to me. It seems like he was in draught from the time his wife left him, I was from the time I came to this timeline.

He made gentle love to me to satisfy me rather than to satisfy himself. He seemed to learn some techniques while writing the books. Or was it his knowledge passed onto other Kumars? He was their original.

I slept in his embrace, forgetting my depression.

From that night on, I began spending every evening in Reyansh's bed.

Unlike before, I started locking the connecting door to the children's room and even the door to my own bedroom. I couldn't bear the thought of Atul or Reena waking up in the night, wandering in, and finding my bed empty. They were still too young to understand the complexity of everything we had endured—of everything I was still trying to piece together.

But in Reyansh's arms, I found something I hadn't felt in a long time.

Peace.

And strangely, a sense of belonging.

Each time I lay beside him, I felt Kumar's presence so vividly that it confused my own sense of identity. Reyansh wasn't trying to replace him—he never once said or did anything to assume Kumar's place—but the comfort, the tenderness, and the quiet strength he offered... it all felt so familiar.

Maybe it was the effect of the merged timelines. Maybe it was fate, rewriting my story while I was still living it.

Over time, Reyansh became more than a companion.

He became my husband in every way that mattered.

Atul and Reena began calling him “Daddy” without being told. It happened naturally, like water finding its way downhill. There were no long talks, no attempts to explain—they simply started saying it, and he never corrected them.

And Kumar... Kumar faded into memory. A tender ache, a dream I once lived.

Now, my days were here.

With Reyansh.

With our children.

In this second chance life had quietly handed me.

Some weeks later, we received an encrypted call on behalf of Bob.

The voice on the other end was calm but direct:

“Rashmi will be arriving in New York soon to procure medical equipment. You may bring her to your housing complex and introduce her to the others—but remind everyone, secrecy must be maintained.”

Rashmi.

My heart skipped. It had been so long since Reyansh had seen his daughter.

She arrived as scheduled, accompanied by her assistant, Hrithik. After settling into their hotel, they visited our office for the equipment inspection.

As I welcomed them in, I called Reyansh to my cabin.

The moment Rashmi laid eyes on him, she froze.

“Daddy!” she cried and rushed into his arms.

He stood stunned for a moment, and then hugged her back tightly, overcome with emotion he rarely allowed himself to show.

We sat down, and I gently explained everything—how the timelines had merged, how he came to live in New York with me and the children, and why we had all been relocated here under Bob’s directive.

Rashmi and Hrithik reviewed the equipment, finalized their selections, and we arranged for transport. Later that evening, we brought them to our housing complex. There, Rashmi was introduced to the rest of the group—Sunitha, Revathi, Loveleen, Molly, and their children.

It was a quiet but warm gathering, filled with unspoken emotion. She listened, observed, and for a while, simply enjoyed being with her father again.

Before she left, Reyansh took her aside and made her promise:

“Please, don’t tell anyone about us. Not even your mother. This... has to remain between us.”

She nodded solemnly.

Then she left.

Just when life was beginning to feel settled, the call came.

A new transmission. Highly classified.

“Prepare to return to India immediately. Alien forces are inbound. Earth is no longer secure.”

We didn’t ask questions.

We knew better than that.

Within hours, we packed up everything. The children were surprisingly calm, as if they too could sense the change in the air.

Using the transporter discreetly installed at our house, we returned to Hyderabad.

Home, once again—but not for peace.

A storm was coming.

To Be Continued in...

Attack of the Aliens

