



THE RAISE OF KALKI

World in Turmoil

RAVI KUMAR PARAMKUSAM



The Raise of Kalki

Timelines Merger

by Ravi Kumar Paramkusam

Sequel to

Kumar's Parallel Timelines

Series Developed by Ravikiran &

Characters Developed by R Kumar

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Three Idiots and a Brave Man by Ravi Kiran

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Trip to Mars by Ravi Kumar Paramkusam

Three Idiots and Ram by Ravi Kumar

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This book is dedicated to all my friends who have helped in writing this book and also to My Family who supported me and gave their invaluable opinions and Ideas for the story. And to Ravikiran for creating Kumar's Love Life Series and R Kumar for creating characters for this series.

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Preface

Kumar was summoned to the Mars Intermediate Meeting Station—a neutral zone between Earth and Mars, known only to a select few. It was here that he was introduced to Bob's superior, a towering presence of calm intelligence—none other than Indrasen, the enigmatic Martian emissary who had been quietly observing Earth's evolution.

The meeting was more than symbolic. It was a test.

Indrasen laid out the terms: A \$10 billion grant. No strings attached. Only one goal—the **betterment of humanity**, starting with India.

Kumar, already known for his grassroots efforts and scalable welfare models, accepted the challenge without hesitation. It wasn't just a financial test—it was a moral one. Could a man of Earth use Martian technology, wealth, and goodwill for truly altruistic purposes?

With Bob by his side, Kumar returned to Earth.

Within weeks, \$5 billion was flowing into critical projects—rural healthcare, decentralized education platforms, clean energy hubs, smart irrigation systems, and AI-assisted logistics for disaster response. India began to shift. Slowly, but unmistakably.

But the other \$5 billion? That was kept quiet.

Behind the scenes, Kumar had activated a consortium of brilliant minds—scientists, engineers, visionaries. Together, they began the most ambitious project ever conceived on Earth by a civilian: **a manned interplanetary spaceship**. Not just to reach Mars, but to return, to understand, and perhaps, to connect civilizations.

The vessel, codenamed “**Aarohan**”—meaning "ascension"—was an engineering marvel. Built in stealth across multiple

sites, it was finally transported to **Sriharikota**, ISRO's launch base, under the guise of a deep-space scientific mission.

Final systems checks began. Fuel cells activated. Communication links encrypted. Even Indrasen's AI support modules had been discreetly integrated into the core systems.

Back at the command center, Kumar stood silently in the observation room. Years of planning had led to this moment. But this wasn't just about space travel. It was about proving something to both worlds.

That **humanity, given the right resources, could rise beyond greed.**

As the countdown to launch began, a ripple of awareness passed through those who knew the truth. This wasn't just a mission to Mars.

It was the beginning of a new era.

PART 1

Merging of Timelines

Chapter 1

The Arrival at the Moon Base

Kumar, a visionary software entrepreneur from the first split timeline, stood with his wife Loveleen, his friend Atul, Atul's wife Molly, Molly's daughter, and his own daughter Joy. They had just arrived—though not on Earth. Not anymore.

They were on the Moon.

A man approached them, calm and composed.

"I'm Robert Fernandes," he said. "But you can call me Bob."

His voice carried the weight of hidden truths.

"You've been brought here because the world is on the brink of collapse. The first signs were already visible—the coronavirus pandemic, the global financial instability. What comes next is far worse: wars, societal breakdown, and widespread devastation."

Kumar, ever the pragmatist, asked, "How can we help?"

Bob responded without hesitation. "For fifty years, we've been experimenting with time itself. We've created multiple *split timelines*—branches of existence where versions of you and others have lived alternate lives. Now, we are beginning the final phase: **merging the timelines into a single, unified timeline.**

"When that happens," he continued, "you will awaken with enhanced abilities—mental, physical, even metaphysical. These capabilities are crucial. You will be part of an elite group chosen to counter the impending destruction and help restore peace."

He pointed to the dark expanse beyond the bunker.

“You will be taken underground. The timeline merge process is unstable. It must occur while you're in isolation. Originally, we planned to use our Mars facility, but time has run out. The Moon is our only option now.”

Kumar, his mind racing, asked, “How will we know when the timelines have merged?”

“We’ll come for you,” Bob replied. “Until then, rest, wait—and be ready.”

“How do we get to the Moon?” Kumar asked.

Bob gestured toward a sleek, black vehicle outside.

“Step into that car. It will take care of the rest.”

And so, they did.

The Others Arrive

As Kumar and his group settled into their underground quarters, more figures began to arrive—each a version of Kumar from a different timeline, each bringing companions, baggage, and unresolved pasts.

Second to arrive was Kumar from the *second split timeline*, a businessman accompanied by Pauleen, Atul, Molly (this time Atul’s girlfriend), and Joy.

Third, a once-troubled Kumar, who had faced legal battles instigated by Nandini and Joy. Now reformed, he came in peace with Sunitha, Loveleen, Atul, Reena, and Dhruv. Nandini and Pauleen arrived separately, their roles yet undefined.

Fourth, *CA Kumar*, a chartered accountant turned strategist, who brought with him Sahithi, Loveleen, Leena, Atul, Reena, and Dhruv.

Fifth, *Pujari Kumar*, a former priest turned business tycoon, who entered the base with Sunitha, Reena, Atul, and Joy. His presence brought a spiritual weight to the gathering.

Sixth, *Young Kumar*, plucked from 1983 and fast-forwarded to 2017. A futuristic prodigy who had built an empire with unmatched intuition. He arrived with Sunitha, Sahithi, Loveleen, Reena, Atul, Joy, Dhruv, and Mahira.

Seventh, *the final Kumar*, a master engineer and architect of the spaceship project, who had led humanity's response to the Martian alliance. He was accompanied by Sahithi, Loveleen, Reena, Atul, Joy, and Dhruv.

And then came one last arrival...

Young Loveleen, also sent from 1983 just before her timeline collapsed. She was visibly younger than the others, a reminder of how fractured and layered their realities had become.

Each Kumar carried not only memories of different lives but also different values, scars, and perspectives. Together, they formed a mosaic of humanity—fragmented, yet bound by a shared fate.

Now, beneath the surface of the Moon, they waited.

Some with hope. Some with suspicion. All with questions.

And above them, far beyond the lunar surface, the merging of timelines had already begun.

What would they become when the process was complete?

Chapter 2

Chapter: The Merge and the Rise of Kalki

With a solemn nod, Bob walked to the command panel and issued the final order: **"Initiate Timeline Merge."**

One by one, the glass partitions containing the timeline variants of Kumar, Atul, Loveleen, Leena, and the others began to shimmer. Slowly, each figure dissolved into threads of light—merging into a single consciousness, a single form.

When the process was complete, the partitions lifted. What remained were the **youngest and most capable versions** of each person. Kumar stood among them—calm, centered, transformed.

Bob stepped forward.

"Kumar, you are now the fusion of all your selves. You have become what we hoped for... a superconscious entity. Your mind now holds the entire databank of human history, your intelligence surpasses all known forms of AI, and you can solve any problem instantly."

Bob turned to Atul.

"You possess the strength of a hundred men, the analytical power of a hundred supercomputers, and stamina rivaling Hanuman himself. Your neural network is synced to Kumar's Supercomputer and the internet. With your thoughts alone, you can access information, process data, and control machines."

He looked to Leena.

"You are now the world's most powerful biomedical scientist. A living encyclopedia of disease, cures, and

medical evolution. You can engineer vaccines, treatments—even for conditions not yet discovered.”

And then, to Loveleen—young, vibrant, and now far wiser.

“You are the heart of this team. You hold fragments of all their knowledge, balanced by purity, intuition, and inner strength.”

One by one, the team of superhumans stood, each having inherited abilities drawn from their merged selves.

The State of the World

Kumar, now reborn, asked, “What happened to the people in the other timelines?”

Bob replied, “All timelines collapsed. Only the **original timeline** survives—merged with the best of the others. Their memories, knowledge, assets, businesses, and talents are now consolidated. You now control one of the largest conglomerates on Earth.”

Bob activated a display.

“Look at the world now. The Northern Hemisphere is devastated—pandemics, economic collapse, and climate disasters. Billions are affected.”

Kumar asked the question that had haunted many: **“How did the virus begin?”**

Bob answered gravely.

“China was engineering a virus to neutralize Indian soldiers in the Himalayas. Indian DNA has a unique gene sequence they wanted to target. But a lab accident released the virus. It mutated rapidly—more than any natural virus could—and spread worldwide before anyone understood what was happening. The rest of the world failed to quarantine

properly. The virus, now supercharged by human meddling, became unstoppable.”

Kumar frowned. “Why would they do that?”

Bob’s face darkened.

“Because they were manipulated. We—what your history calls ‘the gods’—left Earth 5,000 years ago. But some of us stayed behind to guide and protect. Unfortunately, a **splinter group** remained as well—those you once called **Rakshasas**. Most of their kind were wiped out by Lord Krishna, but a few survived, hiding in China, subtly influencing their development.”

Bob revealed the truth.

“Every major disaster—World Wars, pandemics, terrorist attacks—has traces of their influence. Now they are preparing something even greater... **The Pralayam**—the Great Flood. If it happens, humanity will not survive. And we don’t have the power to recover the species after that.”

Kumar stood in silence. “Then... what do we do?”

The Truth About Kumar: Surya Deva Raya

Bob turned to him.

“You ask why you were chosen. For that, you must remember who you were in your first life. In 17th-century Bharat Khand, you were **Surya Deva Raya**, nephew of King Venkatapati Deva Raya. You governed the Krishna-Godavari region from your palace in present-day Vijayawada. A noble, wise, and spiritual ruler.”

Bob continued.

“You loved a woman named **Seetha**, daughter of city administrator Jayabheri. She was learned and just, and she

became your companion in rule and worship. But palace politics forced you to marry **Bhavani**, a royal bride chosen by your father. Though your heart remained with Seetha, your duties tore you apart.”

“Eventually, you married Seetha in secret. But Bhavani, jealous and betrayed, had you assassinated. I was assigned by our masters to protect you, but I failed. You were supposed to rise as the **destroyer of demons**, the one who would restore balance to Earth.”

Bob bowed his head. “That is why, in this era, we split your essence across timelines—to test, refine, and rebuild you. And now, we have merged your forms into one.”

“**You are Kalki**. The final avatar. The one who will save Earth from total destruction.”

A New Beginning

Bob stepped back and gestured toward the large viewing window. Below them, Earth rotated—blue, beautiful, fragile.

“The Rakshasas are already moving. Wars, weather disasters, and another wave of bio-terror are coming. You will return to Earth. You will lead this world into the Light—or stand as its last hope in the darkness.”

Kumar — **Kalki** — looked to his companions. Atul, the unstoppable force. Leena, the healer. Loveleen, the soul. Others, each with purpose and power.

The silence was heavy.

Then, Kumar nodded.

“Let’s begin.”

Note: Readers to know his full story can read it in the Prequel, *Surya Deva Raya* by the same writer.

PART 2

Raise of Kalki

Chapter 1

Kumar

We had now arrived on Earth and reached the house in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad. I decided this bungalow would serve as our headquarters.

I examined the equipment delivered from the manufacturing company. Among the items were **mind communication devices**—small earpieces that allow users to communicate telepathically with others who have the same device, or alternatively, they can function like mobile phones.

There were also **teleportation devices**, enabling instant travel from one location to another, and **anti-gravity devices**, capable of lifting heavy objects effortlessly. These could also be worn by individuals, allowing flight with the help of attached thrusters.

However, **no time-travel device** was found among the equipment. Perhaps they considered it too risky to provide us with such a tool.

I instructed everyone to collect and immediately begin using the mind communication devices. Once that was done, we convened for a meeting to plan our next course of action.

“While we are meeting,” I said, “use the communication devices to speak privately with individuals. If you want to speak to everyone, you may speak aloud.”

I laid out the major concerns before us. According to Bob, we are heading into very difficult times. There’s the potential for war—possibly a **Third World War**—which could result in the total devastation of Earth. We may face **floods in some regions** and **famine in others**, leading to widespread **food shortages**. Since the scale of

future flooding is unknown, I chose this bungalow—located on a hill—as our base of operations.

Teleportation devices have already been distributed across our offices in India. I want the same setup in all our **ashrams across the state**. Additionally, we must establish a **direct connection with the weather bureau**, with one person assigned to continuously monitor weather updates from our headquarters.

Given recent climate events—like the **2018 Kerala floods** and the **2013 Kedarnath disaster**—it's clear the threat is real. It's possible they had anticipated these situations. The death of **Kumar in 2015** might have been a major setback for them, which may explain why they brought him from **1983 to 2017**. Perhaps he needed time to adjust before participating in this operation. As we saw earlier, **eight chambers existed but only seven were filled**—a possible sign of an incomplete plan.

Next, we discussed the threat of the Rakshasas, which Bob mentioned. Every world has its share of evil, and it's possible Bob intends to eliminate his enemies through us. We already deal with **terrorist threats**, many of which are supported by **Pakistan**. The **U.S. military's exit from Afghanistan** raises questions about regional stability—how **Russia**, the **Taliban**, and the **Afghan government** might respond is still unknown.

Then there's the **China–Pakistan alliance**, which seems designed to attack India from two sides. Pakistan struggles to support its own economy yet continues to pursue conflict with India. China, with its vast population, could field a large military force. However, many believe the average Chinese soldier lacks courage—often referred to disparagingly in the West. While their technology is advanced, they lack the combat experience of Indian troops, especially in mountainous terrain.

The **recent border clashes** have made this evident. China may be baiting India into conflict, disregarding casualties to provoke international attention. It's also possible they're hiding a **secret weapon** to deploy if war breaks out—this cannot be ruled out.

Operational Assignments: Now, we need to divide responsibilities. Since **Sunitha** previously led operations, she will resume that role. **Atul** and I will work together to evaluate our needs and determine what additional staff we require. First, we reviewed which **companies survived the merger**.

After a full audit, we found that our **Bombay-based software companies**, including **Future India** and **Kumar's International**, are still active. We've also retained some other companies from alternate timelines—like **Sunitha's chain of Super Bazaars** and **factories from Swamy's timeline**.

Our **Cyber Towers offices**, our flat, and **interior design offices** near **Rao's Hospital**, along with this bungalow, are still under our control. A neighboring flat once owned by **Doctor Rohan** is up for sale, and we plan to acquire it. **Nandini** has set up a trust linked to **Rao's Hospital** and her bungalow—we need to gather all details related to that.

Sakshi, along with her daughters **Rachana** and **Disha**, is facing trouble with her hotel business. She has decided to sell the hotel and relocate to Hyderabad, where she owns a house.

From the original timeline, **Kumar**, his wife **Anita**, and daughters **Leena** and **Rashmi** have all been retained. The version of **Kumar** who was brought from the past—along with **Nandini**, her twins **Atul** and **Reena**—was relocated to the USA, joined by **Sunitha** and her daughter **Anjali**, **Loveleen** with **Dhruv** from the CA Kumar timeline, my sister

Revathi with her daughter **Shravani**, and **Joy**, who had divorced **Raj**.

As for the **allocation of personnel**, **Nandini** and her son **Vivek Kumar Rao** have been relocated here. I am assigning her to **Bombay to oversee the finances of Future India**.

Meanwhile, **Loveleen, Atul, and I** will begin training for the upcoming **Mars mission**. Once that is underway, we will turn our focus to **identifying Bob's enemies**.

It took us six months to consolidate our position in this timeline—though calling it a *timeline* might be misleading. This appears to be the **original timeline**, the root reality. While many familiar faces have surfaced, they come from **different versions** of history—different timelines.

Take **Sakshi**, for instance. In the version I knew, she had only one daughter, **Disha**. But in this reality, she also has an older daughter, **Rachana**, who seems to have come from another timeline. Similarly, we located **Leena, Rashmi**, and their mother **Anita** from the original timeline. They believed that **Kumar**, their father, had gone abroad and disappeared. They had no idea he was in hiding for their protection—shielded from our enemies. Due to serious **security concerns**, we couldn't reach out to them, and we were forced to hide our identities.

But before anything else, our **top priority** remains: **identifying our enemies**.

The **second critical mission** is launching the **spaceship to Mars**. We've already shortlisted a few people for the mission, but more candidates need to be evaluated. Thankfully, we have full **government support**, and we are set to become the **first country to launch a manned**

mission to Mars. Our **Mars Probe** has already been deployed and is transmitting images, though they aren't strictly necessary—**Bob has granted us access to their Martian base**, allowing us to land and begin operations directly.

It also appears that the **\$10 billion grant** we received was merely a test. The ambitious reforms we initiated—especially in **agriculture** and **education**—were either **reversed** or **never took root** in this version of reality. There's no visible impact of the **\$5 billion** intended for those sectors. However, the **\$5 billion spent on the spacecraft** was not wasted. That effort stands as a success.

Still, **some people in our lives are not what we expected.**

For instance, I had hoped to reunite with **Nandini and our two children**, but I only caught a brief glimpse of them before the merger. Post-merger, **Nandini emerged with her son, Vivek Kumar**, and I've appointed her as the **head of finance at Future India.**

Sakshi has sold her **damaged hotel in Manali**, following an **earthquake during the merger**, and moved to **Hyderabad.** I had purchased a house for her, where she now lives. She remains outside of our active operations, and we have deliberately kept her uninvolved to avoid exposing her to our **security risks.** Later, we learned that after relocating, she married off **Rachana to Raj**—a match arranged through one of our distant cousins who encountered her in Hyderabad. I chose not to intervene in the marriage, as by the time the information reached me, it was too late. Moreover, maintaining our secrecy meant **not interfering** in the affairs of those outside the circle.

We've kept an eye on people connected to us, but maintained a **cautious distance.**

Another complication is the presence of **two versions of Leena**: one from the **original timeline**, daughter of Kumar and Anita, and another **merged Leena** from a different timeline. To avoid any confusion or complications on Earth, we've decided to assign **Anita's daughter Leena** to the **Mars mission**.

Chapter 2

Kumar

er team of Kumar and Loveleen in charge of the spaceship and their son Dhruv was flying to Mars as a doctor.

Now our next step is finding the people targeting the world, whom Bob referred to as Rakshasas.

We caught the duo, who were searching for us when they went to Nandini's flat. They must have been following Rashmi when she went to meet Nandini aWe decided to **prioritize the Mars mission** before dealing with our enemies. If we acted against them first, they might sabotage our space program. This mission is too important to be derailed by a revenge agenda.

I appointed **Atul** to oversee candidate selection for the Mars mission, with **Disha** serving as the **coordinator**. Invitations were sent to individuals we had already shortlisted:

- **Leena**, daughter of Anita
- **Nancy**, an IT professor
- **Reetu Khanna**, Loveleen's niece
- **Dr. Mithali Sharma** and **Dr. Dhruv Khanna Kumar**
- **Shreya Singhania**, Sunitha's daughter
- **Preethi Kumar**, goddaughter of Swamy

Disha was tasked with finalizing other candidates from various disciplines as per mission requirements.

All selected candidates were required to undergo **medical and DNA tests** to identify those with the **special genetic markers** that would enhance their ability to travel in space and adapt to conditions on Mars.

Those who passed were sent to our **training facility near Vizag**, previously a virus lab, now converted into a **space research and training center**. This center was equipped with **simulated Martian environments**, including gravity-controlled floors and a mini-laboratory for ongoing tests. An identical lab was also installed aboard the spaceship.

During this time, we received intel about a suspicious **house in the Srisailam forest** being used for **illegal operations**. This came to light after a team of YouTubers—Disha among them—visited the site to film ghost sightings, as the location was rumored to be haunted. Their footage revealed that **unknown individuals were searching for us** and using **our advanced technology**, including a **transporter device**. These individuals operated only at night, likely to maintain the illusion of paranormal activity.

Upon analyzing the video, we began **monitoring their movements**. They had even reached **Anita's flat**, though fortunately, Anita was visiting her parents, Leena was at work, and Rashmi was at university when it happened.

Later, they attempted to infiltrate our **space training center**. Security reported someone taking photos of the trainees. In response, we installed surveillance cameras along the route from the living quarters to the main facility. Two trainees, posing as a couple, were behaving suspiciously—trying to avoid training and the cameras. When we searched their belongings, we found **a hidden camera and a pair of invisibility cloaks**—technology originally developed by us but now in enemy hands.

To protect our mission and mislead those spying on us, we **staged a launch**. We boarded the ship with the candidates, disembarked with the maintenance crew, and made it appear that **Loveleen and I** were piloting the spaceship. We

allowed the **government to announce publicly** that I was the **pilot** and Loveleen the **co-pilot**. In reality, the **ship was controlled by AI**, using **our avatars** as the human face of the mission.

Following further investigation, we **interrogated captured operatives**, who revealed that the **Srisailam house** was under the control of a second-in-command named **Kwon Cho**, from **North Korea**. He, like many others, had never seen or heard of the mysterious "Number One" who was truly in charge.

Another operative hinted at a **second high-ranking figure**, working with various **terrorist organizations** in the Islamic world. This man, known only as **Mama Ali**, appeared to have **unlimited access to funds and weapons**, much like Bob. His exact technology base remains unclear, but we know he's accessed several of our **stored products**, likely including those hidden in the Srisailam forest. His original identity is still unknown.

Meanwhile, the **second wave of COVID-19** hit India hard in **March 2021**, with daily cases peaking above **400,000**. The government prioritized vaccinations, starting with senior citizens, and eventually rolling them out for the general population. Following the merger, we all received a vaccine developed by **our lab**, which proved superior to the public version.

This wave severely **strained the Indian healthcare system**, with reported deaths exceeding **500,000**, though indirect fatalities may have been just as high. Fortunately, the situation is now under control. People adapted by working from home and relying on **internet-based communications**,

especially **mobile and video platforms**. Unfortunately, **many small businesses** were forced to shut down.

Despite some setbacks, our operations **remained relatively stable**. The merger left us unsure about the **extent of our resources**, so we couldn't immediately gauge the impact. We expect more clarity once we finalize our **accounts for 2020 and 2021**.

Lastly, tensions on the **Indo-China border** remain unresolved. The **violent clashes in 2020** resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. The full extent of those events is still unclear. We must investigate whether **China's aggression** was an attempt to distract from global attention on COVID-19, or if they have **deeper strategic objectives**.

Chapter 3

Loveleen

For the last five years, I studied Law at London University. A year ago, I worked briefly as a junior lawyer at a small criminal law firm. Life was ordinary—until it wasn't.

One day, they came for us. I don't know who they were, only that they took us to their moon base. Yes, the moon. I didn't understand what was happening until they locked us underground behind glass partitions.

In my partition was an older man—Reyansh Kumar. He looked to be my father's age. With him was Nandini, a composed woman who told me she was a hospital administrator. Kumar, she explained, worked on hospital software. She had twins: Atul and Reena.

"Why are we here?" I asked.

"I came to return to my husband," she said, pointing to another partition. "He's in there. Somewhere."

"What's his name?"

"Kumar," she said. "He looks like this one. Only younger."

As time passed, the remaining partitions filled—with people who looked eerily similar to each other. Some older, some younger—but unmistakably versions of the same individuals.

Then the man who brought us in said, "We are beginning the merging."

The lights dimmed.

When they returned, several partitions were empty. Only one version of each person remained.

They began calling people out, one by one. Eventually, they came to me. I was terrified.

They performed physical tests, then asked questions. Memories began flooding me—memories I hadn't lived, but somehow knew. Slowly, they settled into clarity.

In one life, I had been married to Kumar. We had two children: Atul and Joy. In another, my husband was someone else—impotent. Kumar helped me conceive our son, Dhruv. In yet another version, Nandini was Kumar's wife, and Kumar promised to make my father Chief Minister if I stayed close to him. When Nandini disappeared, I married him. We had a son. But politics consumed me, and I pushed him away.

The man said, "Whatever you remember—it's the past. Put it aside. Live as you choose now. We prepared you to be consort to the younger Kumar who has emerged from the merge."

They sent us back to Earth.

Kumar—now called *Kalki*—said, "We have a house in Jubilee Hills. We'll start our new life there."

I moved in with Dhruv, Sunitha, Anjali, Atul, and Reena. Eventually, some left for abroad. Only Sunitha, Anjali, and I remained.

Time passed. I noticed oddities.

Kalki was slightly older than me, always distant, deep in thought—as if he were scanning the universe for answers. He'd suddenly say, "See that man—bring him here," or, "He's boarding a flight—track him."

Whenever we went out, he gave me a coat and a dress. "Wear these," he'd say. "Don't remove the hair from the pocket. It holds the look."

In the mirror, I still saw myself. Even when others used the shapeshifting devices, they appeared unchanged—unless I photographed them.

Kalki said, “That’s your gift. You see the true form, even through illusion.”

Nandini, different from the one I met on the moon, had a son named Vivek. She was sent to manage the business in Mumbai. The others all knew their roles, their purposes. Except me.

Kalki took me to a flat on the seventh floor. Leena and Reena came too. They didn’t feel like his daughters—more like younger sisters.

Despite our shared memories, I didn’t feel like his wife. We had not married. We kept our distance.

A year has passed since the merger.

And still, I’m trying to understand who I truly am.

Sunitha

I have been working from Hyderabad for the past few years. Ever since the merger, I’ve felt a change in myself—something different.

I have a daughter named Anjali, and now I have another daughter, Shreya. I was told that Shreya has two cousins, Disha and Rachana. Although we are not in direct contact with them, their mother, Sakshi, is said to be my sister-in-law.

I was married to Kumar, who lived from 1987 to 2000. He passed away in his sleep in 2015. Later, another Kumar—this one from the year 1983—appeared and took over our companies in 2020. Now, the Kumar who has become

known as Kalki appears to be a replica of that second Kumar. He looks to be about 25 years old.

His mission is to identify and confront the enemies of mankind. According to Bob, these enemies are attempting to trigger massive floods prematurely. Factors like climate change seem to be aiding their cause. Over the past two years, we've clearly witnessed changes in climate:

- Scorching heatwaves during summer
- Unseasonal and heavy rainfall causing flash floods
- Colder-than-normal winters
- Record-breaking high and low temperatures
- Localized rain dumps leading to flooding
- Northern hemisphere cold spells knocking out power stations, creating crisis situations

Amidst all this, there is growing fear that Russia might use nuclear weapons in its conflict with Ukraine.

.

Kumar

For the past few months, we've been using **shape-shifting devices** to move around unnoticed. The enemies still believe we're aboard the spaceship, orbiting in deep space. This illusion has lulled them into a false sense of security, allowing us to monitor them more effectively.

To keep an eye on their operations, I secretly installed **CCTV cameras** around the jungle house. The feed from these cameras is routed to a **DVR hidden during the day** and retrieved at night. Two of our agents, disguised using shape-shifting tech as those we had previously arrested, were deployed on-site to blend in.

We also managed to **install a mobile tower** close to the main road near the house—just close enough to pick up signals and transmit live footage during the night. After a week of patient observation, we finally got our breakthrough. I must thank **Disha and her team** for identifying the location.

One evening, we caught **Mama Ali** meeting **Kwon Cho** at the jungle house. Despite their use of coded language, it became clear: **they are planning coordinated attacks on the Indian subcontinent**, targeting India's bordering nations—**Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan**.

At first, I wondered why they would include Pakistan and Bangladesh, both Muslim-majority nations. Then it struck me—they intend to **trigger refugee crises**, flooding India with desperate people. The country, still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, would be overwhelmed. Among those refugees, **terrorists could slip through undetected**, mirroring the strategy seen during the **Rohingya conflict** in Myanmar.

From their conversations, it's evident that the **mastermind is based in China** and is orchestrating this destabilization. Mama Ali expressed his unwavering support and spoke openly about expanding **global terrorist activities**. He then departed with his men via **a transporter**.

I was initially overwhelmed. Had I been in the timeline of the Kumar who led the Mars mission, I could have contacted the government directly—perhaps even the **RAW**. But here, I had no such contacts. No consortium to back me. No leverage.

So, I turned to the **party office in Hyderabad**, presenting them with the surveillance footage and explaining everything. They managed to arrange a visit to the **Home Minister**, but the state head raised logistical concerns:

“The minister is available in one hour. How can you fly to Delhi so fast?”

I replied, “That’s not an issue. We have **advanced transport systems**. I’ll be there within the hour. Please fix the appointment.”

I left for our flat, used the transporter, and within half an hour, I arrived at the **Home Minister’s office in Delhi**. After security checks, I was made to wait. An hour later, **Home Secretary Mr. Mehta** called me in.

I showed him the videos, explained how we had secured the location, and detailed our surveillance setup. I told him the jungle house was originally our **warehouse**, which had been taken over forcefully.

When he saw the lift in the footage, he asked, “Where are these men coming from?”

I replied, “We’ve been developing this **transportation technology** for years. We even tried to market it commercially, but failed. However, we’re continuing work on several **advanced technologies** that could be valuable to the government.”

I handed over **product brochures** from my folder.

Mr. Mehta skimmed through them and called for the **Mars Mission file**. After reviewing it, he asked,

“Aren’t you the one who launched the Mars spaceship?”

I nodded. “Yes, our firm built and launched that ship.”

He pressed, “Then why not approach us through those official channels?”

I answered, “Because this isn’t part of our official work. I’ve been assigned to uncover those responsible for the impending **destruction of mankind**.”

He paused, then asked, "What do you mean?"

"This mission has been planned for over **thirty years**."

He studied me for a moment. "But you don't look older than 25."

I smiled. "That's because I've been **rejuvenated**. I'm 58."

Mr. Mehta leaned back. "We aren't particularly concerned about Sri Lanka or Bangladesh—they're already destabilizing. But this intel on **Kwon Cho** and **Mama Ali** is useful. This is the first visual confirmation we have of Ali. We'll pass the information to **intelligence agencies**."

I asked, "Do you think there's a risk Pakistan might **sell nuclear weapons** in the resulting chaos?"

He replied, "Other than a few Gulf nations, there aren't many likely buyers."

I concluded, "We'll continue monitoring the enemy. Two of our agents are already undercover. They'll only break silence if there's a major emergency. Until then, they remain embedded."

With that, I left his office, unsure if they'd truly act on the warning. They might inform **RAW** about Mama Ali, but beyond that, I suspected **inaction**.

Once outside, I called **Loveleen**.

"I'm in Delhi. Want to meet up?"

"Of course," she said.

"Come to our office via the transporter. I'll wait."

She arrived in fifteen minutes. We met in the **conference room**, and for a moment, I was taken back—she looked exactly as she had when I first met her at my **25th birthday party**. I remembered how I had earned her trust by helping fulfill her father's dream of becoming **Chief Minister**.

I said, “We haven’t met your parents since arriving here. Maybe it’s time we do.”

We headed to **Loveleen’s bungalow**. She called the **watchman** to let us in. Once at the main door, we **deactivated our shape-shifting devices** and returned to our original forms.

Her mother, **Daljit Kaur**, came out.

“The watchman said visitors arrived. I didn’t know you were back from London! When did you come? Why didn’t you tell us?”

Loveleen replied, “We’re in Delhi for business. Meet **Mr. Kalki Kumar**—he runs multiple businesses. I work with his firm.”

Daljit looked at me carefully. “Is he from South India?” she asked.

“Yes, Mom,” Loveleen replied. “He’s my boss.”

Daljit nodded, expression neutral. “Alright, I’ll call your father,” she said and walked into the inner room.

Loveleen gestured to the sofa. “Please, sit down. Let’s see what Dad says.”

A few moments later, **Rajveer Khanna** entered. He looked exactly as I remembered him—just like the first time we met, at my 25th birthday party. I stood up to greet him and shook his hand.

We all sat down. Rajveer looked at me and asked, “So, what do you do?”

I replied, “You may have heard about the spaceship mission to Mars?”

Rajveer nodded. “Yes. Our government launched it, didn’t they?”

I smiled faintly. “No. It wasn’t the government. **We** launched the mission. We simply allowed the government to take credit.”

Rajveer turned to Loveleen, confused. “But weren’t you both on that spaceship? We saw the two of you boarding on live television.”

Daljit chimed in, “I remember that moment vividly. I was shocked, thinking Loveleen went to Mars without even informing us. Then I convinced myself it must’ve been someone else.”

I explained, “It was all part of a calculated **drama**—a staged departure to mislead certain parties.”

Rajveer leaned in. “So, what kind of business empire do you run?”

“We have a number of ventures,” I said. “From **software services** and **biotech**, to **space research** and **infrastructure development**. Our major holdings include **Future India**, **Kumar’s International**, and **Vaccine Lab** among others.”

Rajveer raised an eyebrow. “And what brings you here, then?”

Before I could answer, Loveleen spoke firmly, “We came to ask for your **blessings. We want to get married.**”

Daljit blinked, then said, “But we’ve already fixed your engagement to **Gurvinder Singh Ji’s** son.”

Loveleen’s tone sharpened. “You don’t really know what kind of person **Guru** is.”

Daljit defended, “They have wealth, political connections. It could help your father become CM. You know how important that is.”

Loveleen said flatly, “What good is money when he’s **impotent?**”

Daljit stared at her. “What are you saying?”

“He can’t father children,” Loveleen said. “And beyond that, he’s mentally unstable. A manipulative, obsessive psychopath. Kumar, on the other hand, not only has greater financial power—he also has the **political clout to make Dad Chief Minister.**”

Rajveer turned to me. “Kumar, how much did that spaceship cost?”

Loveleen responded on my behalf. “It cost over **20 billion dollars**. Kumar personally contributed **5 billion** through his grants. The rest came from our network of partner companies.”

Daljit sighed. “So, you don’t want to marry Guru. You want to marry Kumar?”

“We’re **already married**,” Loveleen said. “It happened in **London**. We came here to seek your **blessings**, not your permission.”

Daljit and Rajveer exchanged a look. Daljit said softly, “Come inside, ji. We need to talk.”

They stepped into another room and returned after about ten minutes. Rajveer was more composed now.

“How do you know about Guru’s condition?” he asked.

“Kumar had **suspensions**,” Loveleen said. “He made some inquiries. What he found was disturbing.”

Daljit let out a slow breath. “If you’re already married, there’s not much we can say. Fine. We’ll arrange a **reception**. Let us make the preparations, and we’ll inform you.”

Loveleen's eyes softened. "Thank you, Mom... Dad. Once you fix a date, just give me a call. For now, we're staying in **Hyderabad.**"

She rose and gestured to me. "Come, Kumar."

We walked into her room. She unlocked the cupboard in the corner. Moments later, **Daljit and Rajveer quietly followed**, curious.

Loveleen opened the cupboard fully, revealing a **sleek, futuristic panel** behind it. She pressed a few buttons. A soft hum vibrated through the room.

"This," she said, turning to them, "is a **transporter** developed by Kumar's company. It can **instantly move us** anywhere. For security reasons, we kept it off. Once we leave, **please switch it off again**. When I need to return, I'll call and ask you to activate it."

Daljit and Rajveer stared in silent awe as we stepped into the transporter. Loveleen keyed in the destination: **Hyderabad.**

In the blink of an eye, we were back.

Loveleen immediately called her mother. "Mom, we've arrived safely. Please switch off the transporter now."

A week later, I received an official call from the **Defence Ministry** asking me to attend a high-level meeting. I travelled to **Delhi**, accompanied by **Loveleen** and **Atul**.

We arrived at the **Defence Minister's office**, where we were directed to a secure meeting room. One by one, the country's top leaders walked in—the **Defence Minister**, **Home Minister**, and the **Minister of External Affairs**. To my surprise, **the Prime Minister** himself entered last.

I kept my reaction to myself but took it as a sign of the seriousness of the situation.

The **Defence Minister** opened the meeting.

“This session is regarding the **identity of Mama Ali**. Our agencies traced his appearances at multiple high-level meetings. He even attended his sister’s *nikah* in **Dubai** a few days ago. However, we found **no record of his travel or vehicle usage**.”

Atul responded calmly,

“That’s because he doesn’t use traditional methods of travel. He’s currently at the **Al Karim Skyscraper**, top floor, in **Dubai**. He travels using a **transporter**, not cars or planes. Additionally, he employs **shape-shifting devices** and an **invisibility cloak**, making him extremely hard to detect.”

The **Defence Minister** nodded, then shifted topics.

“We’ve received intel that the **USA** is preparing to **send troops to Ukraine** to directly support the war against **Russia**. This will likely trigger **full NATO involvement**. Our cabinet has decided that **India will remain neutral**. But we want your assessment. Will **China** support this war?”

I replied,

“China will **not** get involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Instead, it is preparing for a **covert two-front assault** on **India**, using **Pakistan** as its ally.”

The **Minister of External Affairs** leaned forward.

“But **Pakistan’s economy is in shambles**. Would they really attempt something so risky right now?”

I answered,

“They don’t have much of a choice. Their population is **angry** and **disillusioned**, questioning their government’s past military expenditure funded by **US grants**. To **divert attention** and **placate the public**, the military leadership is considering **mobilizing their dormant war machine**.”

I continued,

“However, we have prepared extensively. We’ve developed **high-performance drones** capable of firing **miniature missiles**—lightweight but **highly destructive**. These drones can **neutralize advancing troops**. For heavier targets like **tanks**, we’ve built **larger strike drones** modeled on US systems.

If they attempt to deploy **air support**, we have a solution for that too. Our teams have engineered a **point-and-fire EMP device**. It can **disable enemy aircraft or drones mid-flight**. What’s special is its **directional targeting**—unlike conventional EMPs, this one won’t affect our own electronics.”

The **Defence Minister** asked,

“Is that truly safe? Could our own systems still be affected?”

I replied,

“We’ve mitigated that by **narrowing the EMP stream** to a focused beam. Unlike standard pulses that blanket entire areas, this device is **highly precise**.”

The **Home Minister** interjected,

“And when did you develop all this? Why are we just hearing about it now?”

I answered,

“These technologies have been **under development for years**. However, in **early 2021**, we had to **consolidate all**

our companies after internal restructuring. Since then, progress has accelerated.”

At last, the **Prime Minister** spoke.

“So, you’re confident we can face any eventuality?”

I looked at him directly.

“Yes, Prime Minister. We are monitoring events **in real-time**, across the world. Our technology allows us to **observe, intercept, and analyze** any communication, movement, or strategy. We’ve already hacked into **multiple global networks**. Of course, we’re not making this public—we don’t want to cause **global panic** or **diplomatic complications**.”

I turned to Atul.

“Why don’t you give them a demonstration?”

Atul smiled and tapped on his tablet.

“The **US President** is currently preparing to **retire to his private quarters** for the night.”

The Defence Minister frowned.

“Tell us something **verifiable** and **useful**.”

Atul nodded.

“Earlier today, he had a **classified meeting with senior military heads**. The decision was made to **launch troops into Ukraine** within the next few hours. The US military is already **on standby**. This can be **confirmed through diplomatic channels**.”

The Defence Minister sat back.

“What else?”

Atul continued,

"All NATO countries are currently aligning their logistics and military plans in support of the US. Within 48 hours, we will see a full-scale engagement."

The **Prime Minister** turned to me again.

"And China?"

I reiterated,

"As I said, China will stay out of the Ukraine war. But it's using this global distraction to execute a **proxy offensive** on **India**, with **Pakistan** acting as the primary aggressor. The moment the world's eyes are elsewhere, they will act."

As anticipated, **U.S. troops began landing** on the **outskirts of Russian-occupied Ukrainian cities**, marking a major escalation in the war.

The **U.S. President** extended a **strategic grant offer** to **Pakistan**, requesting access to their former **Afghan War-era airbases** for military operations. However, **Pakistan refused**. Accepting the offer would have **forced them into alignment** with NATO, preventing them from participating in the planned **joint offensive against India with China**.

Behind the scenes, **Pakistan and China** began **covertly mobilizing forces** along the Indian border. Their official justification was pre-emptive: they claimed their troop build-up was only to **prevent an Indian attack**.

India, aware of the disinformation, responded with **measured silence**. No official statements were released. The **Opposition parties**, sensing a vacuum, **attacked the government in the media**, demanding an explanation and accusing it of inaction.

In reality, **India had already begun a quiet counter-offensive.**

Small units were sent to border regions, not to engage, but to **observe** and **delay**. More curiously, **rows of unmarked trucks** were mobilized to the frontlines instead of traditional reinforcements. This move drew **ridicule**.

The opposition was relentless:

"Does the government plan to block tanks with *trucks*? Are we sending drivers instead of soldiers to war?"

But the government **said nothing**. They knew exactly what they were doing.

Then came the day.

A **joint Sino-Pakistani offensive** was launched in the early hours of dawn.

As their soldiers moved forward in tight formations and approached the Indian fences, the Indian troops **quietly cut the ropes** on the tops of the parked trucks.

The coverings fell away to reveal the real payload: **hundreds of armed autonomous drones**, programmed and dormant—until now.

Within seconds, a **swarm of drones** lifted into the sky, their wings humming with lethal precision. They **zeroed in on the advancing troops**, launching coordinated airstrikes that **decimated the frontline units**. Explosions rocked the border, and confusion swept through the attacking forces.

In a state of panic, **Pakistani commanders** called for emergency clearance to launch **nuclear missiles**.

Authorization was granted. But when the operators tried to activate the launch systems.

Nothing happened.

The screens were frozen. Every system had been hacked. The same occurred on the Chinese side—lockouts, failed authorizations, and system overrides. India had anticipated this. Their cyber-intelligence units had already taken control of both adversaries' nuclear command systems weeks in advance.

Realizing they had been technologically and tactically outmatched, the attacking forces retreated and requested immediate ceasefire talks. The Indian External Affairs Minister, calm and collected, responded:

"It was never our intention to escalate war. If you withdraw your forces, we are open to restoring peace in the region."

Within hours, China and Pakistan began a full disengagement of their border troops. India had won a dual-front war—without firing a single bullet from a soldier.

The global impact was immediate.

Emboldened by its swift and bloodless victory, India issued a stern public warning to both the USA and Russia, demanding an immediate halt to the Ukraine conflict and the initiation of peace talks.

This diplomatic strike stunned the world.

For the first time in modern history, India was recognized not only as a military victor, but as a global superpower—

a nation that defeated war through strategy, silence, and technology.

With a single decisive stroke, **India reshaped the balance of power**, relegating the **USA and Russia** to reactive positions, and **claiming the mantle of global leadership**—not through conquest, but through **control and restraint**.

Chapter: Shadows in the Bamboo

With one war behind us and the border secured, our focus shifted toward uncovering the true mastermind—the **Asur**—the shadowy force behind the attempted invasion of India. For lack of a better name, that's what we began calling him. An entity beyond conventional identity. A presence. A threat.

We got our first solid lead when **Kwon Cho** and **Mama Ali** were tracked visiting **China**, where they held **closed-door meetings** with several high-ranking Chinese ministers. The list of attendees was top-secret, but our intelligence was able to **shortlist several candidates**.

Despite weeks of **surveillance** from our **Island Bunker**—built by Bob as an off-grid operational hub—we couldn't identify who among them could be the Asur. All of them looked like typical Chinese ministers: composed, short-statured, unassuming.

But we knew better. If the Asur was **not fully human**, or worse, a **hybrid**, he might be concealing his **non-Chinese features**, possibly **height over 6 feet 6 inches**, with **shape-shifting technology**. He could even be over **7 feet tall**, altering his appearance to blend in. We suspected he was using **both a cloaking device and morphing tech**.

Only one person could potentially see through that deception: **Loveleen**.

But her power to see through **shapeshifting** only worked in **direct physical presence**—not through screens or lenses.

Mission: Beijing

After consultations with the Indian government, we decided to **embed Loveleen** into the Indian Embassy in **Beijing** as an **Assistant to the Ambassador**. This would give her legitimate access to government functions and the Chinese elite.

Loveleen's Journal:

I arrived in Beijing under diplomatic credentials. After a swift induction at the embassy, I was assigned a private cabin and staff access under Ambassador **Neeta Bijlani**.

Three days later, we received an **invitation to the Chinese New Year celebration** at the **Beijing Cultural Centre**.

I attended the event with our delegation, dressed formally, and with eyes sharp. I kept a low profile. At one point, I drifted near a **professional photographer**, casually engaging in conversation. I watched what he captured through the lens and compared it with what I saw in real-time. Nothing looked suspicious.

Before leaving, I handed him my email ID and requested the full set of photos.

The next morning, I received a secure link to the album. I studied each image carefully, zooming in on faces, trying to

spot inconsistencies—blurring, mismatches, distortions, anything my ability could register as shapeshifted.

But nothing. Everyone looked **exactly** like how they appeared in person.

Was my ability failing? Or had they **upgraded their cloaks** to resist even **genetic recognition**?

I contacted **Kumar**.

“It’s possible,” he said, “that they’ve found a way to **bypass your detection**, or more likely, the Asur didn’t attend the party at all.”

I said, “That’s strange. This was **the event**—if he were still in China, he **should’ve been** there.”

Kumar replied, “Which means... he **might not be in China anymore**.”

He recalled what **Bob** had once hinted before the **Mars mission**—that post-timeline merger, the Asur might **shift positions globally**. He wasn’t bound to any one nation. He could now be **operating from India itself**.

Return to India

Fearing a political flare-up and rising COVID cases in China, Kumar recalled me. I boarded the next diplomatic flight and reached **Chennai**, from where I was transported to **Hyderabad** via our in-house **transporter system**.

Once back, I showed Kumar the party images. He studied them and concluded what I had suspected.

“He wasn’t there. That means he’s probably already moved operations.”

“Do you think he’s using the **jungle house** again?” I asked.

“Very likely,” Kumar replied. “It’s remote, hard to monitor, and has access to the **original DVR infrastructure** we planted earlier.”

We also realized something more troubling.

“At the time of the **timeline merger**, they must have gotten access to our tech. Maybe even **blueprints**.”

“Or they’re **manufacturing their own versions**,” I added. “They’re using **transporter variants**—probably tuned to a **different frequency band**.”

Kumar frowned.

“That makes sense. The war may have **soured their alliances**. If the Asur pushed China and Pakistan into that war, and it failed, he’s now **persona non grata** to them.”

“Which leaves only one hiding place: **India**,” I said. “He’s probably **in disguise**, maybe already planted in some high-ranking position.”

“We’re lucky we have the **drones** and **scanners** from our old timeline,” Kumar said. “They may help us track activity at the forest house.”

He paused, then added grimly,

“Let’s go back to where it started. We’re going to keep a **round-the-clock watch** on that house. This time, we’re going to find him.”

Kumar

Chapter: Shadows on the Screen

We were back in the **Island Bunker**, our most secure facility, watching global events unfold in real time. Screens lined the walls—feeds from satellite hacks, intelligence intercepts, drone footage, and more. Atul had done the impossible—

hacking into the NSA, who themselves had tapped into half the world.

Now, we had **eyes almost everywhere**.

Gopi's voice cut through the hum of machines:

"Sir, take a look at the forest house feed. Something's off."

I turned to the monitor. The footage zoomed in on a familiar face.

"That's the **state cabinet minister**," I muttered. "What's he doing there?"

His voice, thick with fear, echoed over our enhanced audio system.

"We're trying to collect donations from the business community... we just need more time..."

His tone shifted mid-sentence, changing from pleading to terrified.

"Sorry, sir. I will follow your orders."

The people he was speaking to were **off-camera**—out of focus.

Gopi suggested reviewing earlier footage to identify the visitors.

But there was a snag.

"No one entered," Gopi said after combing through the timestamped logs. "The place was sealed from the outside."

Then it struck me.

"He's speaking to **monitors on the wall**... with **subtitles only**. They've muted the speakers. They're avoiding sound transmission—**paranoid about eavesdropping**."

It made sense. Just days earlier, there had been a **skirmish with some treasure hunters** who stumbled into the house at night. Now they were paranoid. It was likely that whoever was behind this didn't trust even their own tech anymore.

"Still," I said, "we need better angles. Send a team in to install **additional micro-cameras**—covert thermal and angle-flex drones. And make it quick."

The Cameras Don't Lie

After the new cams were deployed, things became clearer.

The house had been turned into a **command centre**—complete with **high-performance CPUs, wall-mounted displays, and speakers** that were being manually switched off and on. Someone was managing both **clandestine meetings and communication** from this site. Possibly remotely.

Then came a call from **Loveleen**:

"Dad and Mom want to host a **reception for us**. They're calling to fix a date."

I told her to let them plan, and I'd arrive as needed. But my focus was elsewhere. Something was brewing at the forest house.

Unexpected Guests

A few days later, while monitoring the house, we got a **breakthrough**.

This time, it wasn't just a minister. **The state Finance Minister** had been brought in—and the feed caught something even more damning.

A **Zoom call** had been initiated. And on screen were:

- **Kwon Cho**
- **Mama Ali**
- **A towering, muscular man** I'd never seen before
- And... the **Chief Minister** of the state

I sat up straight. The CM's presence was **unbelievable**. He had been spiraling the state into chaos for months—undermining the opposition, collapsing the economy, and breaking every rule of political conduct. Now it made sense. He wasn't incompetent—he was **complicit**.

The tall, dark man was introduced as **Makara**. His posture, command, and the fear he evoked from others suggested he was no ordinary thug.

He was one of **Asur's lieutenants**—possibly his **right-hand**.

The conversation revealed troubling things.

"There are no funds left," the FM said.

"Then get loans from the **World Bank**," Makara replied. "I will make the arrangements."

"Let's see what the boss says," the CM added cautiously.

But no one ever named the boss.

Makara was **careful**—a shadow behind another shadow. He took orders, and he delivered fear.

As the call continued, the FM and CM began discussing overdue payments and shifting funds from public projects—**possibly to launder money or redirect it for covert operations**. But something about their conversation felt performative, rehearsed. Then it clicked.

“They’re not just discussing finances,” I said to Gopi. “They’re doing it **for someone else to hear**. Maybe **Asur is watching**, silently, without revealing himself.”

When the call ended, the screen went black. I sat watching it, staring into nothingness, trying to connect the dots. Eventually, exhaustion took over and I drifted off.

I woke up at **7 AM**, the bunker cold and humming with quiet energy. I grabbed a cup of coffee and returned to the screens. Surveillance had become our way of life. Every hour awake, every second on alert—until the threat was identified and eliminated.

“Until the **enemies of mankind** are exposed,” I whispered to myself, “we won’t sleep in peace.”

Chapter: Reflections of the Ages

My thoughts drifted toward the ancient Puranas—those timeless epics woven with myth, wisdom, and enigmas. I had studied both the original texts and their various translations, and over time, I had come to realize how much gets lost in interpretation.

Consider the Dashavatara—the ten principal incarnations of Vishnu. The first two, Matsya (Fish) and Kurma (Tortoise), are symbolic restorers of the Earth after great floods, or Pralayas. Matsya guides Manu to safety, a metaphor perhaps for extraterrestrial beings rescuing the few survivors. Kurma’s depiction is puzzling—why a tortoise? Maybe because it lives in both land and water, a symbol of adaptability. Or maybe the ancient writers struggled to describe a submersible spacecraft and settled for a creature that resembled it.

The next eight avatars are all warriors of cosmic balance, tasked with eliminating the Asura threat. Varaha rescues the Earth from the cosmic ocean by defeating Hiranyaksha. Narasimha, neither man nor animal, kills Hiranyakashipu using claws and guile, bypassing a divine loophole. Vamana, in his deceptive humility, pushes the mighty Mahabali beneath the Earth. Parashurama wipes out the corrupt warrior class, while Rama vanquishes Ravana. Krishna, strategic and divine, leads a systematic purge of the remaining Asuras, culminating in the Kurukshetra War.

Interestingly, Brahma, the creator, seems complicit in aiding Asuras through boons, which may explain why there are so few temples dedicated to him. His favor toward the Asura clan might have led to his near-erasure from public worship.

Then comes Buddha, the anomaly in this sequence. A preacher of peace among destroyers. Was he a true avatar of Vishnu, or an ideological intermission before the final war? By the time of Buddha, the gods may have already withdrawn from Earth, leaving behind echoes in temple stones and Vedic chants.

The final avatar, Kalki, is prophesied to arrive in the darkest hours of Kaliyuga. But I do not believe I am Kalki, nor a divine reincarnation. My DNA carries no celestial marker. If anything, I am a vessel—an assistant, perhaps—chosen to act when the world trembles again.

My journey to Mars revealed that the “gods” may not be deities in the spiritual sense but highly advanced beings—possibly remnants of a pre-Pralaya civilization, or travelers from distant galaxies. The myths about flying chariots, divine weapons, and celestial music begin to make more sense through this lens. The Dwajasthambams—flag poles in temples—might be misunderstood antennae or energy

amplifiers. Stories of Akashvani—divine voices—could have been radio transmissions.

Even the tale of Kamsa being warned of Krishna's birth might not be divine prophecy but intercepted communication. The gods—or watchers—may have tried to manipulate history subtly, embedding technology within ritual.

Wars in the epics were never merely battles of muscle. Weapons were “taught” by masters. What were these weapons that could be “passed on”? Knowledge of codes? Biometric sequences? Access credentials? Whatever they were, the translators lacked the vocabulary to do justice to the technology.

From what I've uncovered, it seems the gods departed Earth voluntarily—either exiled by deceit, weary of war, or unwilling to live among a race that had lost its reverence. They left behind assistants, relics, and scattered temples—some of which have now turned into political stages or tourist sites. And over time, mankind began attributing every outcome—good or bad—to the gods.

As faith grew mechanical, morality weakened. People started using gods not as spiritual guides, but as cosmic bailouts. Do wrong, pay a priest, donate a cow, build a temple—sins wiped clean.

With no fear of divine retribution or timely justice, people devolved. Crime became monstrous. A man butchers his lover, stores her parts in a fridge. Children are violated. Courts delay. The rich walk free while the poor rot in cells. The Kaliyug is no longer a prophecy—it's our news cycle.

Politicians, often under criminal investigation, rise to power through welfare schemes and coercion. Projects are renamed, old promises discarded, and welfare cash is

distributed strategically. The same cash, sometimes reclaimed under duress, fuels election campaigns.

And amid this chaos, social media emerged—not as a tool for progress, but as the new battlefield. Influencers shape public opinion. Fact and fiction blend. Misinformation becomes a weapon more potent than a sword. Firms now offer to manipulate elections, boost political narratives, manufacture consent.

It is no longer about who rules, but who controls the narrative.

Bob told me that the Asur—the one behind this global unrest—has been active for centuries. If he's still here, hiding behind shapeshifting cloaks, invisible frequencies, and political stooges, then our task is not merely to expose him—but to dismantle the very system that feeds him.

We must find him. We must stop him.

For this isn't just about India. This is about the Earth surviving its final dark age—before a new Satya Yuga can begin.

Chapter: The Forgotten Half of Darkness

Atul walked over to me and said, “You should get some rest. I'll take over monitoring for now.”

I nodded, exhausted, and rose from my seat in the bunker. Outside, the secure transporter awaited. I placed my palm on the biometric panel, and in a blink, I was standing in my Hyderabad residence. The silence of home wrapped around me like a forgotten comfort. I made my way to the bedroom and collapsed into a dreamless sleep.

Hours later, I was stirred by the distant hum of a TV—faint, indistinct, yet persistent. Something about the sound prickled at my subconscious. I got up, walked to the hall, turned on the TV, and switched to a news channel.

A heated debate was unfolding: Members of Parliament were embroiled in controversy over one of them calling someone **“Surpanaka.”** Opposition leaders were demanding an apology, accusing the ruling party of disrespect. The member in question had not named anyone directly, but the uproar refused to die down.

The name echoed in my mind. Surpanaka.

It started as a vague itch, then a sharp realization.

Until now, we had been searching only for male Asuras—Hiranyaksha, Kamsa, Ravana... What if we had been blind to the other half of the mythos? What if the architect of this chaos wasn't a man?

The name **Surpanaka**, the sister of Ravana—often dismissed as a side character—flashed like a beacon. In the Ramayana, she is a dark, passionate force who disrupts order, driven by desire, vengeance, and humiliation. What if her story was just the beginning? What if, across timelines and identities, **the female Asuras had simply evolved—smarter, quieter, invisible to our biases?**

I immediately called Loveleen and Atul. When they answered, I said, “We’ve been chasing shadows shaped like men. But what if the enemy we seek—**the one behind this global unrest, this network of war, politics, and corruption—is a woman?**”

They both paused. And then, almost in unison, agreed.

“It’s a possibility we never considered,” Loveleen said. “But it makes sense.”

Atul added, “Time to expand our profiles. We’ll start looking through our feeds again—with this new lens.”

Surpanaka wasn’t just a name hurled in Parliament. It might be a clue. An accidental whisper of the **forgotten half of the darkness**.

And now... we were listening.

PART 3

Searching for Rakshasi

Chapter 1

Loveleen

The Mask of Mahima

Kumar's theory—that our enemy might be a woman—completely changed the direction of our investigation. It explained why we had constantly hit dead ends. We had been scanning for male footprints, following trails left by demons like Ravana, Hiranyaksha, and Kamsa—never considering the possibility of a **Rakshasi**.

He had used **Surpanaka** as an example—Ravana's sister, who approached Rama with desire and was disfigured by Lakshmana for her boldness. That one insult sparked a war between kingdoms. Could our own crisis have begun with a woman who felt similarly wronged—or driven by deeper, darker motives?

Just then, my phone rang. It was Mom.

"Loveleen," she said, "Can you come to Delhi? We need to finalise the reception arrangements."

"I'll be there in thirty minutes," I replied. "Please switch on the transporter I showed you in my room."

"I'll do that and call you back," she said and hung up.

A few minutes later, her name flashed again. I picked up.

"Beta, I couldn't switch it on. It's not responding. What now?"

"Don't worry, Mom. I'll head to our office and come from there."

She sounded relieved. "Okay, see you soon."

I quickly packed the papers I was reviewing, slung the bag over my shoulder, and headed to the transporter at our

Hyderabad facility. Moments later, I materialised at our Delhi office and took a company car home.

At home, Mom showed me the reception plan and the draft invitations. I reviewed them, made some corrections, and handed them back for printing.

Later, I was sitting in the living room going over documents when Priya, our house help, quietly turned on the television.

She noticed me glance up and said apologetically, "Sorry, ma'am. Just watching my daily serial."

I smiled and returned to my work. After the serial ended, she flipped to a Hindi movie.

A few moments passed, and a loud fight scene blared through the speakers. I instinctively looked up.

On the screen, two men were fighting. One was **huge**—easily 6'6", built like a wall of muscle, his movements brutal and precise. The other was lean, scrappy—the hero of the film. Something about the big man caught my attention. I was transfixed.

"Priya," I asked, not taking my eyes off the screen, "Who's the guy playing the villain?"

"Oh, that's **Mohsin**," she replied. "The hero is Faizal Khan."

"Mohsin... Tell me more about him."

"He's very famous," Priya said with excitement. "A big star in action films. But his **elder sister**—she's even more powerful now. She left acting and joined politics. She's a **minister** in Maharashtra."

That got my attention.

"What's her name?"

"**Mahima Khan.**"

I pulled out my phone and searched the name.

Her face filled the screen. Elegant. Charismatic. Eyes like daggers—charming but calculating. Her rise was fast, almost too fast. Former actress, now in state politics, commanding enormous influence in multiple sectors—media, film, even local businesses.

Something about her presence sent a shiver through me. I couldn't explain it, but **every instinct screamed** that this woman was **not ordinary**.

I immediately called Kumar.

"Kumar," I said, "I may have found someone. Her name is **Mahima Khan**. I want you to do a deep dive. Everything—history, connections, finances, affiliations. And check if she's been involved with any underground networks or unexplained activity."

There was silence for a beat. Then Kumar said, "Send me her details. If she's the Rakshasi we've been missing, it won't take long before we find something... very dark."

As I ended the call, I kept staring at Mahima's photo.

Beautiful. Powerful. And, perhaps, hiding a secret older than our world.

Kumar

Kumar's Encounter with Monica Khan

I had been sitting for over an hour at a bar, nursing a glass of beer while waiting for a client who was now clearly a no-show. As I took a slow sip, my gaze drifted across the room and landed on a couple seated opposite. The woman, facing me, smiled brightly. I instinctively turned around to check if she was smiling at someone else—no one. I looked back at her, and she smiled again. Curious.

She stood up, whispered something to her companion, and walked straight toward me.

"Mind if I sit here?" she asked.

"Please," I said, gesturing to the seat across.

"You don't remember me, do you?" she said, sliding into the chair with a glint in her eye.

"I'm trying to place your face. I'm Kumar. And you are?"

"I'm Monica—Anil Bajaj's sister. My brother mentioned you had gone to Mars?"

I chuckled. "That's the story, but the trip was just for publicity."

"He said you planned the whole mission and built the spaceship. How long did it take?"

"Fifteen years of work."

"You look too young for that. What age did you start?"

"Thirty-four."

She laughed. "You don't even look twenty-five. How are you fifty?"

"We ran a few experiments in our lab. Long story."

"Are you waiting for someone? Hope I'm not intruding."

"Not at all. I think my client ditched me."

"In this mobile age, no courtesy either. Well, I was here to meet a producer with my manager."

I looked toward the man she came in with, still seated across the bar, disinterested. Either he didn't care or she'd warned him.

"So, you produce films?"

“Yes. TV serials too. But even producers need funding. That’s why I’m here.”

She pulled a business card from her purse and handed it to me.

Monica Khan, Film & TV Producer

Office address printed below.

“Khan?”

“Married to Mohsin Khan. You probably haven’t heard of him—you don’t look like a Bollywood regular.”

“Not really. Been buried in work.”

“Dinner?” she asked suddenly.

I looked at her, trying to read the intent. There was a genuine spark in her eyes.

“Your manager?”

“He can handle himself.”

I got up. “Alright, let’s go. Got a place in mind?”

She smiled, took my arm, and led me out. Her driver pulled up in a black SUV, and we slid into the back seat. We reached the restaurant in ten minutes. The waiters seemed to know her well. We were seated quickly and handed menus.

I put mine aside. “Monica, you had something to discuss?”

She hesitated, then leaned in slightly. “You’ve developed such amazing tech. I want to make a story that leaves Hollywood speechless. Can you help me?”

“I might have a few manuscripts. Haven’t written in a while—been focused on building tech.”

“You’ve really been to Mars?”

“Yes. Before we began developing space travel, I made the trip. Story writing fell by the wayside since then.”

The waiter returned. I ordered something simple. Monica made her selections.

“I’d love to see those manuscripts,” she said.

“I can take you to our old software office in Juhu where they’re stored.”

We ate mostly in silence. As I chewed, I contacted Atul using my mind-controlled device and asked him to pull up data on Mohsin and Monica Khan. A moment later, he transmitted the results to my mind:

Mahima Khan—former actress turned politician, now a minister. Her brother Mohsin—6'7", gym-built, a notorious villain in films, possibly with gang connections. Monica met him at a party, cast him in her film, and eventually married him under unclear circumstances. Her production house was rumored to have funding from underground sources, possibly tied to Dubai-based cartels. No solid proof.

Monica noticed I was distracted. “What are you thinking?”

“About the kind of story you need. I have one with spies, shapeshifting cloaks, invisible suits, anti-gravity thrusters—futuristic tech galore. Another involves an alien invasion. Both are near ready.”

After dinner, I asked, “Would you like to see the manuscripts now?”

“Yes, please.”

We drove to my flat in Andheri West, now more of a storeroom. As we entered, I opened the door. The air was stale, but the place was intact. Monica’s eyes scanned the stacks of labeled boxes.

“What’s all this?”

“Futuristic prototypes,” I said, opening one.

I pulled out a sleek device. “This is a mind-controlled communicator. No SIM, no mobile towers needed. Just think, and it connects—satellite-linked too.”

She looked skeptical but intrigued. “How does it work?”

“Place the earbuds in your ears. It’ll ask your name and number telepathically. Once set, you can use thought to call or receive messages.”

She put them in—and blinked in shock. I initiated a call. She nodded. “I hear you. In my mind.”

I smiled and showed her the transporter in the corner. “This can send us anywhere with another unit. Delhi, Hyderabad, Singapore... just like that.”

She blinked in disbelief.

Then I showed her the shapeshifting coat. “With the right DNA sample, this can make you look, sound, and behave like someone else.”

“Like a strand of hair?”

“Exactly.”

Then came the invisibility cloak. “This hides you completely—even from cameras.”

Finally, I found the manuscripts in a labeled box, flipped through a few, and handed her two.

“Here. One’s a high-tech thriller. The other’s alien warfare.”

She skimmed the first few pages, visibly impressed.

“You want a drink?” I asked. “I’ve got some great scotch stashed from my college days.”

She hesitated, gauging me. Then nodded. “A peg of your best.”

I poured us both glasses. She sipped. "This is excellent."

"I used to collect good stuff back when I lived here. It's been almost 25 years."

There was a note of nostalgia in my voice. Monica caught it. The mood shifted—just a little

Monica paused, her eyes narrowing. "Did you have bad memories here?"

"Not all of them," I said, my voice distant. "But in the end, everyone left."

Something changed in her expression. She stood up, collecting the manuscripts from the table. "I'll go through these and let you know."

She reached up to remove the earbuds. They wouldn't budge.

"These aren't coming out," she said, a bit alarmed.

"They're synced to you now," I explained. "They're not like regular earbuds. Just keep them—they'll come in handy."

"Handy? How?"

"You can think a command and it connects. No phone needed. No voice either. It's silent and secure—no chance of anyone eavesdropping. You can shut it off with a thought. Call anyone. Even if you're kidnapped, you can contact help. It's more than a device—it's a lifeline."

Monica hesitated, weighing my words. "Alright. I'll try them for a few days. I'll let you know what I think." She moved to the door. I followed her out and walked her to her car.

She slid into the seat. The driver pulled away.

I returned to the flat, turned on the AC, changed, and lay down on the bed. The room felt a little emptier after she left.

Some time later, a soft chime in my mind signaled a call. Monica.

I connected.

“Good night,” she said.

“Good night,” I replied, assuming she’d reached home. I let the connection fade into the background and drifted off.

But her channel hadn’t closed.

Through the mental link, I heard a male voice: **“What are you reading?”**

Monica responded, her voice casual. “A manuscript. Someone gave me a couple of stories on futuristic tech. Could be good for a series.”

A pause. Then: **“Okay, come to bed.”**

I heard faint rustling, then soft moaning.

She hadn’t disconnected the call.

A part of me wanted to keep listening. Another part recoiled. I disconnected the feed.

In the silence that followed, I stared at the ceiling, wide awake again.

So, she wasn’t alone.

And I had just handed her our most advanced prototypes—along with a direct line into my thoughts.

Sleep came late.

I was woken up by a call from Monica.

"Good morning. Did I wake you up?" she asked.

"I woke up with your call."

"Sorry, I thought you'd be up by now."

"It's okay. What can I do for you?" I asked, recalling the moaning sounds she made last night.

"I've read part of the manuscript. I want to send it to the scriptwriter for development. Can I?"

"You can. Just remember they're all registered," I said, implying she couldn't proceed without crediting me.

"I won't move forward without informing you."

"Good. Why don't you come to my flat and bring a strand of Mohsin's hair? You might find one in his hairbrush."

"Why? What do you need his hair for?"

"I want to show you something magical. Come ASAP."

"To your flat, right?"

"Yes. I'll be waiting. After that, we'll head to the office."

I ended the call and made myself a coffee in the kitchen. After showering and changing into casuals, I sat down at my computer, checking on some work while waiting for Monica.

She arrived around 11 a.m. and handed me a small plastic pouch containing Mohsin's hair.

"What are you going to do with this? Black magic?"

"No black magic—just a bit of white magic. Watch this."

I turned around, stripped, and put on the shapeshifting coat. After inserting the hair strand into the DNA slot, I activated the device.

When I turned back, Monica gasped, “Mohsin!”

I stepped toward her and kissed her passionately.

Holding her shoulders, I said, “I’m sorry. He must love you deeply. I couldn’t resist your pull.”

“You’re not Mohsin, but your kiss and touch feel just like him. The way you speak and look at me—everything reminds me of him.”

“If you ever need a body double in your films, you can use this shapeshifting coat,” I offered.

She looked into my eyes, pulled me down, and kissed me deeply. But if we were to have sex, I’d need to take the coat off. So instead, I gently let her go and sat on the sofa.

There was a moment of awkward silence.

Monica came over and sat beside me, placing her hand on my thigh.

“Sorry,” I said.

“It’s okay. I wanted to kiss you,” she replied.

I stood up, changed into formal clothes, and returned to the hall.

“Come on. Let’s head to the office in Juhu.”

As she headed toward the door, I guided her to the transporter, selected our Juhu Koliwada office, and pressed the button.

We arrived at our software office.

“This is our software base. I’m the majority shareholder. Most of the tech you saw yesterday are my inventions—fully patented. Let’s meet our Finance Director, Nandini.”

We walked to the adjacent building.

"This is Future India Ltd. Many leading Indian companies hold stakes here. You may wonder about my interest—well, all the products made here are patented by my software company. We also have Kumar's International Ltd., which manufactures ICs."

Seeing me, the receptionist stood and greeted me.

"Is Nandini in?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. Shall I inform her?"

"Please do," I replied, walking toward her office with Monica.

As we reached her cabin, Nandini opened the door and hugged me without noticing Monica.

"Been a while," she said, kissing me on the cheek.

I held her shoulders and asked, "How are you? And how's Vivek?"

"I'm good. I saw Rashmi recently. She mistook me for the other Nandini—the one who left the hospital to her. While we were talking, two men showed up asking about us, and the police detained them."

"I had the police arrest them—they were looking for us," I explained, ensuring Monica overheard. I wanted to gauge whether she might have connections to Asur or any knowledge of him. If she had ties, she might either pass on this info or ask for more details.

We sat down in Nandini's cabin.

"Any emergency?" she asked.

"No, this is Monica Khan—film and TV producer. She's looking for manuscripts and financing. I'm here to pick up some manuscripts and explore financing options for her."

Nandini hesitated. "I've heard rumors that Monica's films were financed by underworld gangs. Not sure we should be involved."

Monica responded, "Mohsin used to get gang money, but I've never used it. That's why I'm seeking funding elsewhere. Otherwise, I'd ask Mohsin or my in-laws."

"I understand," I said. "I have personal funds I can use to help. We'll register a company in Hollywood and finance your films through it. I need to speak to some contacts."

I messaged Nandini discreetly, explaining that this was all part of a strategy to lure the rat out of its burrow.

She caught on. "Our software firm might have funds. You can also access Pujari Kumar's accounts."

"I already have a plan in place. That's why I'm proposing the Hollywood company—it'll help channel resources."

"I'll ask Sunitha in New York to start the registration process. You can wire the funds from your Swiss account."

"Great. I'll head to my cabin. Send Sunitha when she's available."

"She's visiting the plant. I'll call her."

We walked to my cabin and sat down.

"Where's your plant?" Monica asked.

"Near Vizag."

"How long will Sunitha take?"

"If she's wrapping up, just minutes."

"Oh right—you probably have a transporter there too."

"Yes, we have them in major cities. They were once used for couriers. Not sure how many are still operational."

“How do you know Nandini? Is she a colleague or a relative? She seems South Indian.”

“She’s an old friend. She used to run a hospital. Her son Vivek is my son too.”

“How old is Vivek?”

“About 25. I haven’t seen him in a while.”

Just then, Sunitha walked in.

After introductions, I asked about current projects.

She said NASA had requested a Mars probe.

“They can use ours. We don’t need it anymore. It still has a 15–20-year lifespan. Offer them ownership and send sample images.”

“Will do,” she replied.

After checking production plans and offering some input, she left.

Next, Sahithi entered. We exchanged greetings, discussed work, and she left.

A few managers came to greet me—many for the first time. Monica observed quietly as I managed the stream of visitors. I ordered snacks and tea for both of us.

By 5 p.m., the crowd had dispersed. I asked the operator to hold further appointments. Then we used the transporter to return to my flat.

With leftover drinks and snacks, we sat together. Monica spoke, but I was distracted. Sensing it, she stood up.

“I should go.”

Snapping out of my thoughts, I said, “Let me walk you to the car. Sorry for taking your entire day.”

“Not at all. I got to see a businessman in action.”

"This isn't my usual routine. I haven't been here in a while. Our international office is nearby, so many came by to greet me."

"Their expressions said it all—surprised to see such a young boss."

"Most haven't met me before, except old acquaintances."

"How many offices do you have?"

"We have several software units, but the key ones are Future India and Kumar's International."

"Kumar's International is in your name. How much of it do you own?"

"I hold a nominal share—my main interest is chip production for Future India."

"Which company financed the Mars spaceship?"

"That came from my personal account, with help from other businesses. In return, I offered seats to couples they sponsored."

At her car, we noticed the driver was missing. She called him—he was at a nearby tea stall and arrived shortly.

When he returned, I opened the door for Monica. As she sat, I said goodbye and watched her drive off.

Once she left, I activated the mic on her mind-controlled device to monitor her conversations.

Her driver asked, "Where to, ma'am?"

"Juhu house," she replied.

She called Mahima and told her everything. It became clear Mahima had orchestrated our meeting.

I immediately sent Mahima's number to Atul for hacking and added Mohsin's number for monitoring too.

Meanwhile, Monica told Mahima I was setting up a Hollywood company to finance her films, backed by Swiss bank funds. They were clearly trying to estimate my financial strength. After all, launching a Mars mission isn't cheap.

She ended the call and rang Mohsin, suggesting an intimate night based on her tone. Once home, she freshened up and asked the servant to prepare dinner, waiting for Mohsin.

Her thoughts streamed to me via the mind device—unbeknownst to her, I could read her mind like a book. I linked the device to a recording server and disconnected from direct mental access.

Then I transported to my Hyderabad residence, had dinner, and retired for the night.

At midnight, Monica called, but I rejected the call and went back to sleep.

In the morning, after breakfast, I transported myself to the software company. Around 10:30 a.m., Monica called again. She wanted to meet and discuss the manuscript. I told her I was at the Juhu software office and invited her over.

Before she arrived, I removed the mind-reading machine from the safe and placed it on the desk. The device is compact now—we've integrated the circuits into ICs, and it looks just like a pair of regular earphones. It connects to our servers via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth.

Monica arrived within half an hour. The receptionist brought her to my office, and I asked her to sit.

She noticed the device on my desk and asked, "What's this?"

"It's a type of headphone—helps with sleep," I replied casually.

"Can I try it?"

"You just need to put them on and close your eyes. It also works for therapy."

"What kind of therapy?"

"It helps with mental health issues. For example, I once treated a psychopath who mistreated women due to a traumatic college experience. I erased those memories, and he recovered."

"Can it erase the memory of a bad breakup?"

"Yes. Not only can it clear the memory, but it can also help someone forget the person entirely."

"Could you use it to make someone hate another person?"

"That's difficult—but not impossible."

"There's a girl who follows Mohsin everywhere. She calls herself a fan but is really a stalker. She shows up at every shoot."

"Instead of instilling hatred, we could give her a sense of emotional closure. She'd feel she's had enough of him—satisfied rather than obsessed."

"You make a good point. What else can it do?"

"It can store memories and recover them if someone loses them in an accident. It's very useful for treating amnesia."

"Can I have a couple of those earbuds? Mahima wants to try them."

"Sure, but they're at my Andheri flat."

“Okay, I’ll pick them up on the way home.”

“Great. Now, what did you want to discuss?”

“You said you’d give me more manuscripts.”

I went to the cupboard, found two boxes of manuscripts, and placed them on the table. “Check the synopses on the first page to see what suits your needs.”

She sat on the sofa, pulled out some folders, and began reviewing them. I returned to my work.

A knock at the door.

“Yes, Kathy?” I asked. Her full name is Katherine.

“There’s a Commissioner of Police here to see you.”

“Send him in.”

The officer entered, shook my hand, and sat down. He had previously been the SI at Andheri PS, the one Bob had told that I was working undercover with the IB. He looked at me with surprise—perhaps thinking I was Kumar’s son.

“I heard you’ve returned to the office after a long time. Where have you been?”

“I’ve been busy—mainly working on the Mars spaceship project.”

“I saw you on the spaceship. You looked so young—just like all those years ago. I couldn’t believe it.”

“I went to Mars 25 years ago. After returning, I worked on the ship’s development. We’ve only just launched it. The youthfulness is a result of our longevity experiments.”

“Is that technology available to others?”

“Not yet. It’s still experimental.”

“Well, that’s not our concern. We want your help interrogating a convict who may be linked to the kidnapping

of a high-ranking police official. We need to know if he—or his gang—is responsible.”

“Would you prefer I come to your office, or should he be brought here?”

“It’s better if you come to us—for security reasons.”

“Alright. Give me a time. I’ll bring my machine. Here’s my card—call me.”

He shook my hand and left.

I glanced at Monica. She was visibly intrigued. I could tell she was texting Mahima about the Commissioner’s visit. I smiled to myself. She was slowly realizing just how much influence we wield: a Mars mission, collaboration with NASA, cutting-edge tech, and now police asking for my assistance.

Even if she isn’t linked to Asur directly, they might try to exploit my influence. That could reveal their intentions—and maybe even lead us to the group behind the Bombay Bomb Blasts.

Monica held up a manuscript. “This one would be great for a daily serial.”

I reviewed the synopsis. She was right. I had developed the concept with the future of the TV industry in mind. She seemed excited.

“Want to start production soon? Need financing?” I asked.

“No, I can manage for now. I’ll send this to the scriptwriter and return.”

She seemed eager to spend more time with me. I nodded. She left, instructing her driver to deliver the folder and return by 5 p.m.—clearly planning to stay.

It occurred to me she might have been sent by our enemies. They might think I'm weak around women, given my past. True, most women entered my life through coincidence, unlike the few male friends I have—Raj, Krishna, and Prathap.

If Monica was sent to infiltrate, I would let her. Sooner or later, Asur would show himself. We've tried chasing shadows for too long. We don't even know if Asur is male, female, or even human.

Monica returned, sat on the sofa, and resumed reading files.

Sunitha entered with the production plan. She noticed Monica and silently asked who she was. I shook my head—"nothing important."

I reviewed the plan, instructed her to order ICs from International, and adjusted production priorities. Monica watched the interaction closely.

Once, Sunitha had been my girlfriend. But after she married Singhania, I treated her like a colleague. Still, there's a closeness between us that goes beyond a standard workplace relationship.

After Sunitha left, Monica asked, "What's your relationship with her? You two seem close."

"She was my girlfriend once. She was a flight attendant who went missing in an accident and lost her memory. She later married a hotelier who died in an avalanche. We rescued him, and she eventually came back and joined our company."

"How many girlfriends have you had?"

"Sahithi is Leena's mother. Leena's working in the U.S. as a virologist. My wife Nandini had twins—they're studying in

New York. I married Loveleen after Nandini went missing. Loveleen's son, Dr. Dhruv, was on the Mars mission."

"Where is Loveleen now?"

"She's in Delhi, arranging our wedding reception."

"Reception?"

"We told her parents we got married in London during her studies. Now they want a formal reception to gain political traction."

"Will you invite me?"

"Of course. Bring anyone you like."

"Shall we go for lunch?"

"You sent your driver away."

"Don't you have a car?"

"I only use company cars for emergencies. Let me check." I called the receptionist.

"Kathy, do we have a car available?"

"For what purpose, sir?"

"Just lunch."

"I'll arrange one."

I turned to Monica. "Let's go."

We went to Juhu Centaur and sat down at a table.

"So, what's the plan?" she asked.

"Our production house will handle financing. We'll start in a week. You must come to the *mahurat*."

"I'd love to. Just let me know in advance. Hopefully, it won't clash with our reception. We'll be away on our honeymoon."

“How long will you be away?”

“Not decided. We may go to Switzerland—burn some Swiss bank cash.”

“How much do you have there?”

“I’m not sure. We spent a million on the island project. Pujari used some for welfare.”

“You said those accounts belonged to Pujari Kumar. How do you have access?”

“I inherited all his companies and accounts.”

The waiter arrived, took our orders, and left.

As I looked into Monica’s eyes, I noticed a flicker of fear. Her face forced a smile.

“Why not take me to Switzerland instead of Loveleen?”

“How about Manali? I know a hotel there.”

We bought the hotel from Sakshi Singhania post-earthquake. I had it restored and leased it to a hotel chain. We also have a transporter there.

She looked relieved—or perhaps she thought she had me hooked.

“Shall we go this evening?” she asked.

“We keep rooms reserved there for executives. I’ll authorize it.”

The food arrived, and we ate in silence. Monica seemed lost in thought. She barely noticed her food and eventually pushed the plate away.

I didn’t ask questions—this wasn’t the right moment.

“Would you like some tea or coffee?” I offered.

“Tea, please.”

When the waiter returned, I ordered tea.

We sat quietly. She seemed deep in thought. I served the tea. She sipped it silently.

I paid the bill and had to guide her to the car.

Back at the office, I seated her in my cabin and connected the mind-reading machine to her device. The AI began downloading her memories. It took an hour to complete.

I reviewed the files. Monica had been coerced. Her director insisted she cast Mohsin. Mohsin forced himself on her and later pressured her into marriage. Over time, he changed. Mahima demanded funds for political activities, and in return, they asked Monica to gather intel about us.

Her father refused to help, so she tried to do it herself. When she found me at the bar, she thought fate had intervened. Mahima urged her to get closer to me. Monica hoped seducing me might give her access—but her conscience stopped her.

I decided to make her disappear.

I switched off and removed her mind-controlled device, then transported her to our Manali hotel. I left her in my suite with an attendant to care for her and returned to Hyderabad.

I called Atul and told him to monitor and record Mahima and Mohsin's communications.

I kept checking on Monica regularly. After three days, she regained consciousness and seemed back to normal.

I went over and asked, “You mentioned wanting to go to Switzerland—do you still want to go there, or would you prefer the USA?”

Monica replied, “There’s no need. I’m feeling fine now.”

“Come with me to the USA. You can stay there until everything settles down.”

“I didn’t bring any luggage,” she said.

“You can get whatever you need there. Just come with me.”

I took her to the transporter and brought her to the USA. There, I entrusted her to Reyansh, asking him to look after her until she was needed back in India.

After briefly meeting with Sunitha, Loveleen, and others, I returned to India.

When Monica’s driver came to inquire about her, Kathy informed him that Monica had left in an Uber she had booked herself. She claimed she had no idea what happened afterward.

Saturday Evening – Engagement Party

We hosted a party that evening to celebrate our engagement.

At Monica’s request, we also invited Mahima and Mohsin.

When they arrived, I casually asked, “Where’s Monica? She said she’d be attending.”

They seemed surprised by the question—as if they had come to ask me about Monica themselves. My question caught them off guard, leaving them speechless.

Members of the Bajaj family also asked about Monica, but Mahima and Mohsin failed to give a convincing answer.

Later in the evening, we had our engagement ceremony and formally invited everyone to the reception scheduled for the next day.

Sunday – The Reception

The reception went smoothly.

The Khan family, however, did not attend. They cited a death in the family as an excuse. I wasn't sure who had supposedly passed away, but it was clear they simply didn't want to face questions about Monica's whereabouts.

Honeymoon in Switzerland

After the reception, we departed for our honeymoon in Switzerland.

Chapter 2

Loveleen

Kumar had decided to take a break from the ongoing tension of tracking Asur. It was time to unwind and enjoy our honeymoon.

At 9 p.m., the cool night air surrounded us as we sat together on the balcony of our room, sipping tea and talking quietly. The stars above were serene, in stark contrast to the chaotic thoughts we had left behind.

We both carried memories from multiple timelines. I turned to him and asked, “Kumar, what are your dominant memories? As I understand, your body time-travelled from 1983 to 2017. But after the merger, all seven of Kumar’s identities merged into your consciousness. What did it feel like to carry all of those memories?”

He took a deep breath. “It feels like I’ve lived nine lives. I don’t just remember their experiences—I feel their joy, sorrow, and losses as my own. It’s as if nine people are coexisting within me. The moments that hurt most are the ones involving death or separation. I’m still haunted by Sneha’s death in the fire, and by Sunitha vanishing in that plane crash. I remember Sneha’s cancer scare. And Sahithi... she went missing in two timelines—once taken after becoming pregnant, and once kidnapped and sold by Dolly’s gang. Then there was Leena’s kidnapping by Suresh. When Leena was returned to me—a seven-year-old girl from Pujari Kumar’s timeline—I didn’t know how to respond. There was joy in seeing my daughter again, but also confusion. I couldn’t even tell my own parents the truth. I had to say she was an adopted child, with missing parents. It still hurts.”

He paused before asking, “And you? How do you feel about your bad memories?”

“I don’t seem to have many,” I replied. “It’s as though they stripped away my conflicts with Guru, and other painful chapters with my former husbands. What remains are memories of you—detailed, vivid recollections of the two times we were married, and the times you helped me conceive. I have scattered memories of us together in different timelines, but my body still feels untouched—like I’ve never been with anyone. I feel like a virgin.”

“It sounds like they gave you just enough memory to help you navigate the world,” he said gently. “They may have left you with clarity while burdening me with the full spectrum—perhaps because I need it to understand and lead.”

“Maybe,” I nodded. “You and I come from different worlds. I was raised in a business family, never lacking money. You came from a middle-class background.”

“I had to work hard for everything I’ve achieved,” Kumar said, smiling. “You were born with a silver spoon.”

He turned his chair to face me fully. I looked into his eyes—and in that moment, something beyond words passed between us. Through his gaze, a wave of knowledge flowed into me: knowledge of the world, the universe, the stars, and the infinite space beyond.

His eyes sparkled in the gentle light of the balcony, reflecting more than just the glow of a streetlamp. They reflected the love, the care, the passion he'd shown me across all our lives.

Memories came rushing back—of how he had treated me, loved me, held me. I felt a heat rise within me. In that instant, he wasn’t just Kumar—he was my soulmate, the

man I had shared countless lives with, and the one who always found his way back to me.

I reached out, cupped his face in my hands, and kissed him.

Kumar kissed me back, deeply and passionately.

In that one kiss, I travelled through every timeline we had shared. It was a sensation like no other—because every time I'm with him, he brings something new. Something only he can give.

Without a word, he led me back into the hotel room—where his magic continued.

By the time we woke up, it was 9 a.m. I ordered coffee and went to freshen up. When I returned, the coffee had arrived. We each had a cup, enjoying the peaceful start to our day.

Kumar suggested we go sightseeing, and I readily agreed.

We got ready and boarded a tour bus. It was early spring in the Swiss Alps. The trees were just beginning to turn green, and the atmosphere was crisp and pleasant—alive with the scent of new blossoms and melting snow.

We returned to the hotel late at night, after a relaxed dinner.

Just like the previous night, we sat on the balcony of our room. The air was colder than before, so we wrapped ourselves in a shared blanket. Huddled together, we gazed into the vast darkness dotted with faint, scattered lights in the distance.

Tonight, our conversation drifted to business ventures.

I asked, “Kumar, how did you go from a middle-class background to becoming a business tycoon?”

He smiled. “You had a major role in that. Most of the time, you were the catalyst. No one else had the same impact on my success as you did. The only other person who helped was Nandini—when she was my wife.”

“I always thought so. Even when we weren’t physically together, I supported you in one way or another, didn’t I?”

“You’ve always been the force behind me. Whether I was trying to impress you or working with your help, you’ve been the driving reason behind my rise.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“I’ve looked back at all our interactions across timelines. Except for the young Kumar who time-travelled from 1983 to 2017, and the version of me known as Pujari Kumar, you were there in every timeline. You helped me directly or indirectly. In the timeline where Sneha died in a fire, you financed my ventures. You supported me emotionally, financially, spiritually. You’ve always been there.”

“In that timeline, I gave you Dhruv. I loved you more deeply than anyone else. I gave you a purpose, and you gave me back more than I ever expected. The money I invested in your projects felt like money *you* earned. If I hadn’t helped my father become Chief Minister, we wouldn’t have had the funds. So in a way, I just returned what was already yours.”

“Is that how you see it?”

“Yes. Until you helped me into the house after I twisted my ankle, I didn’t know how powerful a man’s touch could be. I burned with that feeling for two days, until you finally explained why you had been avoiding me. Then, when we went to Delhi and you brought me release, I discovered a

whole new world—a world of true passion and intimacy. You brought meaning to my life in ways I can't fully explain."

"After that, I couldn't think of anyone else. Not even Sunitha could satisfy me the way you did. Those three days we spent in Delhi helped me find peace, even if just briefly."

"All this talk... it's igniting that same heat again," I whispered, feeling the tension rise.

Kumar looked at me knowingly. "Let's go inside."

We stood up, left the cold balcony behind, and entered the warmth of our room.

And once again, Kumar continued his magic—for the second night in a row.

Kumar

It was past midnight when Loveleen stirred me from sleep with her usual playful mischief. She leaned in close, gently nibbling on my ear before trailing her hand across my chest. Her touch was familiar, comforting, yet charged with intent.

As her fingers slipped lower, a natural response followed. Desire built between us, and soon we were wrapped in an intimate embrace.

But something felt different this time. As we made love, I sensed a subtle disconnection—like my mind was drifting, being pulled away from the present moment. My body was there, responsive and engaged, but mentally I was elsewhere—trapped between awareness and abstraction.

Loveleen

We spent a quiet, blissful week together. But on the eighth day, everything changed.

Kumar received a message through the hotel reception desk—a request to immediately contact the Island bunker. Atul was the only person who knew our exact location, and if he sent a message, it meant something serious. We had switched off our mind-controlled communication devices the moment we boarded the plane, so this message had to be routed through conventional channels.

Kumar stepped out onto the balcony to take the call in private. I watched from inside, knowing he was likely connecting with Atul through the secure device.

After a few minutes, he came back in, his face tense but composed.

“We have to return to India,” he said. “Please pack our things. I’ll ask reception to clear our bill.”

“What happened?” I asked, already on my feet.

“There was a rocket attack near Mumbai's Necklace Road. No casualties, and the rocket wasn't armed—it landed in a front yard. The authorities believe it was a warning rather than an actual strike. The Mumbai Commissioner of Police tried calling me but couldn't get through. So, he contacted Cathy, and she reached out to Atul.”

“And they think this involves you?”

“Possibly. The commissioner might have a lead and suspects the incident is tied to our investigation into Asur. That's why we're being called back.”

“Understood. I've just finished packing—can you get the door? Someone's knocking.”

Kumar opened the door. It was the bellboy, holding the hotel bill.

Kumar handed him a card. "Please take care of this and return in five minutes to collect our luggage."

"What flight options do we have for getting back to India?" I asked.

"There's a flight to Rome. From there, we can use the transporter at our office to get to India quickly."

Once the bellboy took the bags downstairs, we checked out, caught a cab, and headed to the airport. The flight to Rome was uneventful, though the mood had shifted from relaxed to tense.

After landing in Rome, another cab brought us to our office, where we experienced a brief delay—the manager greeted us and tried to catch up, but Kumar politely explained the urgency of our situation.

Soon after, we transported to Delhi. From there, Kumar left immediately for Mumbai to meet with the Police Commissioner.

Atul

I told Dad to head home—I'd take over the monitoring for now. Loveleen mentioned they were planning an official wedding and reception, so Dad needed time to prepare for the upcoming festivities.

It's strange, really. My father is only slightly older than I am now, and Loveleen, his soon-to-be bride, is younger than me. That makes my stepmother younger than me. It's an odd dynamic—almost mythological in its weirdness.

It reminds me of the story of Ram and his brother Laxman. Ram was exiled to the forest, what we now refer to as

Thadipar, or being barred from entering cities. He and Laxman lived in simple huts in the *Vana*—hermitages used by sages. Their peaceful life was shattered when Surpanakha arrived. In a moment of rage, Laxman disfigured her by cutting off her ears and nose. People often depict Surpanakha as a grotesque demon—but how could the sister of Ravana, the mighty king of Lanka, be ugly?

Loveleen once suggested that the enemy we're looking for might be a woman—someone like Surpanakha. If she were Asur's sister, she would likely be tall, striking, perhaps dark-complexioned. Dangerous and beautiful.

That thought returned to me when Kumar called, asking for intel on Mahima Khan. Most of her public life is available online—she's a celebrity and actress. She has a brother, Mohsin Khan, and he's married to Monica Bajaj. Officially, they met on the set of a movie where Monica was the producer and Mohsin played a villain. After six months of dating, they married. But there were rumors that Mohsin pressured her into the relationship.

I compiled the information and sent it to Kumar and Loveleen. Later, Kumar informed me he had successfully trapped Monica, retrieved her memories, and reconstructed her entire backstory. Then, he and Loveleen went on their honeymoon.

Before leaving, Kumar instructed me to monitor Mahima and Mohsin's mobile communications. They were growing frantic, desperately trying to locate Monica. Kumar had hidden her securely, even from me. He refused to disclose her location over mobile communication to prevent any data leaks.

When I traveled to Delhi for the wedding festivities, he finally told me that Monica was safe in New York, under the

care of "our people." That was the first I'd heard of us having operatives stationed in New York.

Curious, I asked, "Who exactly are 'our people' in New York?"

He replied, "Some individuals from the merger were relocated there for safety—those with children, mostly. All except the original timeline Kumar."

"Did the original timeline Kumar survive the merger?" I asked.

"He wasn't part of the merger," Kumar replied. "He must have been left alone for a specific reason—maybe to document our story."

"That makes sense."

Later, I took a seat in the party area, sipping a cold drink. I avoided alcohol—I needed to be alert for my return to the bunker.

I spotted Cathy entering with three of her friends. She walked over and greeted me.

"Hello, sir."

"No need to call me sir," I said with a smile. "Just Atul."

She turned to her friends and introduced me, "This is Atul—my boss. And these are Nirmala Vaidikaran, Pooja Iyer, and Urmila Mudaliyar."

I noticed a cheeky smile on Nirmala's face. "He's so young—and your boss?" she asked Cathy, raising an eyebrow.

"You should see his dad," Cathy said with a grin. "He looks just as young."

They pulled up chairs and settled around the table. Nirmala had to borrow a chair from a nearby table but didn't seem to mind.

She looked at me playfully. “So, Atul—what did you study?”

“I did my M.Tech and now I work in software engineering.”

“What do you do in software?” she asked.

“My specialty is hacking,” I replied, all while checking her social media profile—linked through Cathy’s. She had done her MBBS in Chennai and was now pursuing her MS in Mumbai. Likely from a well-off family, with a strong medical background.

I said, “I have a brother who’s a doctor. Right now, he’s on his way to Mars.”

“You mean Dr. Dhruv?” she asked, surprised.

“He’s my stepbrother.”

“So that makes Mr. Kumar your father. Who’s your mother?”

“Sneha. But it’s... complicated.”

“What else do you do, aside from hacking?”

“I read people.”

“Oh?” Nirmala challenged. “So, what do you read about me?”

“You did your MBBS in Chennai and chose Mumbai for your post-grad to be near Cathy—your childhood friend. You come from a long line of doctors. You prefer traditional wear—on occasion—and look good in it. You have a younger brother, and you call him Tiger, but his real name is Monkish. When you’re mad at him, you call him Monkey. Your mother is your inspiration. Your father was too busy—he was the President of the Tamil Nadu Medical Association. Your mother’s an OB-GYN. Your grandparents live in a village, and you love spending time there.”

Nirmala blinked. “Whoa. That’s... spot on. Enough about me. What about you?”

“My mother died when I was young. I have a twin sister—Reena. You know my dad—he’s a businessman. He died on New Year’s Eve, 2020, trying to save an employee. Then he came back two weeks later, younger. That version of him was poisoned in 2015 and died in his sleep. Three years later, he returned again—still young. That’s the dad we have now.”

“So that’s why he looks so young... and why he’s marrying now?”

“Exactly. But trust me, it’s all far more complicated than it sounds.”

Pooja and Urmila had been quiet, listening intently.

Pooja suddenly asked, “How does a dead man come back?”

I chuckled. “That’s complicated. We were part of a secret project—one designed by intelligent beings to safeguard Earth, especially India.”

Urmila asked, “You mean aliens?”

“Not necessarily. We refer to them as god’s messengers or divine representatives.”

“Like angels?” she clarified.

“Yes, you could say that.”

“So, what exactly are they trying to do?”

“They’re trying to prevent global destruction—whether through world war, environmental collapse, or other disasters. Something like a great *Pralaya*.”

“What’s your role in this?”

“Our first mission is to identify a villain among us. Someone—or something—causing chaos and destruction from within.”

“Do you know who it is?”

“We suspect they were based in China, but found no proof. So now we’re searching globally.”

Nirmala asked, “Could they be in India?”

“Absolutely. We’ve already discovered some of their operations here.”

“What would such a person look like?”

“They might be tall, with a strong build. Likely dark-skinned rather than fair. Possibly religious—but we have no proof. They could resemble figures like Ravana or Surpanakha if we think mythologically.”

Nirmala’s expression changed. “Could they be in Tamil Nadu?”

“It’s very possible.”

She hesitated, then said, “There was something strange in our village, where my grandfather lives.”

I leaned forward. “Go on.”

“We were visiting for the holidays. Grandpa still does selective medical practice—treating VIPs or rare cases. I used to help him in his nature-based Vaidya Shala. One day, a man came with an entourage. He asked Grandpa to dismiss everyone so they could talk in private. The man matched your description—tall, sturdy, and dark. After an hour, the man left, and Grandpa refused to tell us anything. Later, his assistant came and collected the medicine.”

“Did you find out where he came from?”

"No one in the village knew—only Grandpa. And he won't reveal anything."

"Did the man threaten your grandfather?"

"I don't think so. But Grandpa has stayed silent ever since."

"So you have no idea who the man is?"

She shook her head.

Cathy leaned in. "Sir, do you think this man could be the one you're searching for?"

"I don't know yet. But it could be a clue. Nirmala, would your grandfather be willing to speak with me?"

"You can try, but I can't promise anything. He's very private."

"That's alright. I'll explain the situation and request his help."

Nirmala asked, "How would we go there?"

"We'll take the transporter to Chennai. From there, we have a helicopter that can take us to your village."

"We can go after the wedding tomorrow."

"That works. Just give me a call when you're ready."

"Let's eat now," I said. "We'll need our strength."

Accompanied by Kathy and Nirmala, we used the transporter to travel to Chennai, where a company car took us straight to the airport. We had already informed the pilot to keep the helicopter ready.

From there, we flew to Nirmala's village—**Shankarapuram**.

We landed in an open field near her grandfather's clinic. The area was serene, surrounded by lush greenery. The clinic itself was a charming structure—an old building with sloping red tile roofs, an open courtyard at the center, and a shaded veranda encircling the rooms on all four sides.

Nirmala led us through the quiet corridors to where her grandfather, **Dr. Narasimhan**, sat cross-legged on a mat, mixing medicinal powders and liquids at a low wooden table. The setting felt timeless.

As soon as he saw Nirmala, he stood up with a smile and embraced her.

"What brings you here, child? Are you in need of treatment?" he asked warmly.

Nirmala replied, "Grandpa, this is Atul Kumar. He has come with a special request."

Dr. Narasimhan gestured for us to sit on the floor, mats already arranged. "What can I do for you, Atul Babu?" he asked—*Babu* being a respectful term for a younger person.

We sat cross-legged, respectfully.

I began, "We're trying to locate someone who may be on a path that could bring great harm to our country. Our mission is to intercept him before he causes irreparable damage."

Dr. Narasimhan asked, "Are you from the government? Or a private firm?"

"Neither. We were entrusted with this task by a divine source. Our team is investigating a group with ancestral ties to the Rakshasas—the ancient enemies of the Devatas. Now that the gods have left this realm, they've left behind caretakers to safeguard India—and the world."

“So, you’re claiming to be agents of the Devatas, seeking to confront the Rakshasas?” he asked, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully.

“Not exactly agents—but by-products of divine intervention. My father even visited Indrasen at a Mars intermediary station.”

His eyebrows lifted. “Your father met Indra—on Mars?”

“Yes. They discussed the future of Earth. The gods foresaw catastrophic events—possibly a third world war. Even the COVID-19 outbreak is believed to be one of the precursors. We initially believed Asur, the leader of the Rakshasas, was hiding in China. But we’ve found no evidence. Now our search has shifted to South Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.”

Dr. Narasimhan considered my words carefully. “And how does my clinic fit into this?”

Nirmala gently interjected, “Grandpa, remember the man who came here during my last visit? He arrived with several men, and you asked us to wait outside.”

“Ah, do you mean **Maheshwar**?”

Nirmala nodded. “I don’t know his name. But he matched the description Atul gave.”

“He said he’d injured himself during sword practice. A deep, infected wound. He didn’t want hospital attention. I treated him discreetly.”

Nirmala frowned. “Are you sure it was a training injury? He didn’t strike me as a Naxalite.”

“No, he wasn’t a Naxalite. Their cause is ideological. These men are different.”

“Who are they then? Sri Lankan rebels?”

"No, not at all. From what little I could gather, they're guardians of ancient treasures and temple lands—especially in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. They believe their mission is divine."

I asked, "And Andhra Pradesh?"

"They don't interfere with temples under government management. Their duty is to protect those that are sacred and hidden."

"So, are you saying there are ancient treasures most people don't know about?"

He nodded slowly. "Yes. But I don't have the full details. They trust me with medical care, not their secrets."

"If you're certain they mean no harm, we won't pursue them further. But if there's any threat—"

"They're not our enemies. That much I can say. If anything, they're protectors. But they value secrecy above all."

"I'd like to introduce you to my father, the one who met Indra."

"Where is he now?"

"He just got married yesterday and is on his honeymoon."

"Married? At his age?"

"In this body, it's his first marriage. He's my age now."

"What's his name?"

"Kumar. Founder of Future India, Kumar's International, and Kumar Swamy Super Bazaars. He also owns a number of software companies and manufacturing units."

"I don't follow business news much," he admitted.

Nirmala smiled. "You've been in the village too long, Grandpa."

"That may be true. Before you go, meet your grandmother. She's been asking about you."

"I've been in Mumbai for my studies. But now, Atul has shown me a way to shorten the journey. I'll visit more often."

"Good. Bring your friends next time. Your grandma will be delighted." He smiled at Kathy.

"Of course, Grandpa. We'll meet her now."

We went to meet Nirmala's grandmother, who insisted we stay for lunch. The meal was hearty and comforting. Afterward, we said our goodbyes, and Dr. Narasimhan made Nirmala promise to visit again soon.

We returned by helicopter to Chennai. From there, I sent Nirmala and Kathy back to Bombay and returned to the bunker.

A Week Later

I received a message from Kathy. The Mumbai Commissioner was looking for Kumar urgently. I took his number and gave him a call.

"There's been an incident," he said gravely. "A rocket landed near the bungalows of VIP film stars in Mumbai. It wasn't armed—it seemed more like a warning."

"Where was it launched from?"

"Our team suspects it came from the Arabian Sea, but we haven't pinpointed the launch site."

"Understood. I'll check available data and get back to you."

I began scanning satellite images and searching through internet-stored footage—but found no concrete clues. It

appeared to be a test rocket, likely launched to measure distance or accuracy. I updated the Commissioner.

"I believe it was a test fire—possibly meant to display capability. I'll continue to monitor for new data."

He sounded frustrated. "I'm under pressure from the Home Minister to get answers. Why don't you contact Kumar?"

"I can't. He's somewhere in the Swiss Alps and switched off all devices. We weren't informed of his exact location for security reasons."

"Didn't he consider emergency access?"

"I'm tracking him through other means. I'll get him back."

I checked our Swiss bank transaction logs. From the hotel billing records, I located his whereabouts and called the front desk, asking them to leave a message for Kumar to call me back at the bunker.

He called shortly afterward. I briefed him on the situation.

"I understand," he said. "I'll return to India immediately."

Chapter 3

Atul

A week after Kumar returned from his honeymoon, we held a strategic meeting and decided it was time to directly approach the clandestine army guarding the ancient temple treasures. We hoped they might have some knowledge of Asur or his network.

I compiled a list of suspected sites where their presence was likely. From Chennai, I took a helicopter with a small team of three, as advised by Kumar. He recommended that we include a Tamil-speaking member since there was no guarantee these locals would understand English or Hindi. Some might know Telugu, but that wasn't something we could rely on.

We began with the locations closest to Chennai. In a single day, without the need to refuel, we visited three sites—but found no trace of any armed presence. So, we moved on.

Day Three: A Breakthrough

On the third day, we finally located a group—a small encampment of huts set near one of the sites suspected to house hidden treasure. We landed in a nearby clearing and approached unarmed, keeping our hands visible.

The sound of our helicopter must have alarmed them. As we neared, several armed men emerged, their weapons raised and trained on us.

Our Tamil-speaking teammate quickly called out, explaining that we came in peace and were looking for information.

Before their leader could respond, a nervous, trigger-happy guard fired a shot—aimed straight at me.

I caught the movement from the corner of my eye. Reacting instinctively, I shifted slightly and slapped the bullet down mid-air, sending it into the dust.

The leader immediately shouted for a ceasefire. He stormed over to the soldier, slapped him hard, and barked, “Did I give you the order to shoot? You’re supposed to wait and assess, not act like a fool!”

The soldier, stunned and silent, shook his head.

The leader turned to me, clearly more composed. “Who are you, and what do you want?”

“My name is Atul. My father is Kumar—also known as Kalki. We’re trying to locate Rakshasas who are threatening the peace of this world.”

“Your father is Kalki? Is he human, or something... else?”

“He was chosen by Indrasen during a meeting on Mars. He was offered the mantle of Kalki to prevent future devastation.”

The man studied me. “Interesting story. But why do you believe we know anything about Rakshasas?”

“We’ve been searching globally. We have no direct trace of their location, but several indicators of their activities. One of the most promising leads came from a YouTube video—recorded in the Srisailam jungles.”

“Then why not follow that trail?”

“We tried. But they use transporters—making their movement untraceable. They also rely on encrypted communication. We’ve captured some lower-level operatives, but the leader continues to elude us.”

“So, you’re hoping we might have crossed paths with him?”

“Yes. Since your mission is to protect temple treasures, it's likely you've at least encountered attempts at looting—possibly by their people.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “There was an incident. One of their teams tried to breach a treasure site.”

“And?”

“We didn't intervene. The treasure's own defense took care of them.”

“What does that mean—‘the treasure dealt with them’?”

“Each treasure site is protected by mechanisms or spiritual barriers. Those without the proper clearance cannot enter. Most of that team died—those who survived fled.”

“Then you have seen something—or someone—who might be Asur?”

“I might. Come with me.”

He gestured for me to follow. “Just you. The others stay here.”

As we walked toward a small hillock, I asked, “What's your name?”

“You can call me Maheshwar.”

“And where are we going?”

“To a cave. I'll show you something. But it's also a test.”

“A test?”

“Yes. To prove whether you are truly who you claim to be.”

We reached a rocky outcrop. At its base was a cave entrance, sealed with a large stone slab. Maheshwar touched the stone. It shifted aside silently, revealing a dimly lit interior. Oil lamps lined the walls, casting flickering shadows on ancient carvings.

He led me to a wall where a mirror hung—a polished metal surface framed in gold.

“Think of the person you seek,” he said. “And look into the mirror. It may show you what you need to see.”

I nodded and thought of **Asur**. I stared into the mirror—
—and suddenly, I saw **Maheshwar’s reflection**, smiling.

Then, something struck the back of my head.

Darkness swallowed everything.

Chapter 4

Kumar

The incessant ringing of the phone jolted me awake. I glanced at the clock beside the bed—it was 4:40 a.m.

Groggily, I picked up the receiver.

“We’re calling from the bunker,” said the voice on the line. “The helicopter Atul took to scout treasure sites hasn’t returned overnight.”

“Did you check his GPS coordinates?”

“It’s showing as switched off.”

“What about the last known location?”

“It places him near one of the marked treasure sites.”

“Alright. Wait until sunrise and check the area with the satellite. Let me know if anything changes.”

Disturbed by the news, sleep completely left me. I looked over—Loveleen was still sound asleep, her gentle snoring faint in the early morning stillness.

I stepped onto the balcony and lit a cigarette, staring out into the darkness.

If Atul's GPS and communication devices were off, it likely meant one of two things: he was underground or unconscious. If he had gone willingly into a restricted area, he would’ve left a message. Which meant he was likely taken—against his will.

I called the bunker back. “Arrange a rented helicopter by morning. I’m coming to Chennai to investigate.”

It was approaching 5 a.m. I went into the kitchen, brewed myself a strong cup of coffee, and sat at the dining table, my thoughts racing.

Was Atul captured by Asur's men? Had they learned how to block or disable our communication systems?

After finishing my coffee, I rinsed the cup, took a quick bath, and got dressed.

At 6 a.m., I gently woke Loveleen.

"What time is it?" she murmured.

"Six. I need to leave for the bunker—something's come up."

"Alright," she said, turning over to continue sleeping.

I left quietly and headed for the transporter.

Chennai — The Investigation Begins

Upon arriving at our Chennai office, I proceeded directly to the airport, where I met Gopal, the officer who had alerted me.

"We've analyzed Atul's last GPS signal," Gopal reported. "The helicopter he flew is still on the ground. Satellite images show about 10 to 15 huts nearby, and some movement around them."

"Get the helicopter ready—we're heading there."

"It's already prepped. The pilot has clearance to fly."

Within 15 minutes, we were airborne.

We soon spotted Atul's helicopter and landed beside it. As we approached the nearby huts, a group of ten men emerged, led by someone who exuded authority.

He walked up to me, extended a hand, and said, "I'm Maheshwar."

"I'm Kumar," I replied, shaking his hand.

He smiled. "I expected Kalki. Did he send an assistant?"

"I *am* the one designated as Kalki. But I haven't done anything to earn that name yet."

"Wise of you to say. So, what brings you here?"

"I'm looking for Atul."

"He's already left," Maheshwar replied.

"The helicopter is still here. His last signal was from this location. If he had left, we would've tracked it. It seems he's somewhere inaccessible to radio waves."

"We checked. He didn't appear to have a mobile on him."

"May I see him?"

Maheshwar paused, then nodded. "Come, I'll take you to him."

Inside the Cave

We walked to the base of a small hillock, where a cave entrance lay hidden beneath overgrowth. Two guards stood before a carved stone slab that sealed the inner chamber. They moved aside, and we entered.

Inside, we found Atul—tied to a chair, his head slumped forward. Unconscious.

"What happened to him?" I asked.

"Nothing serious," Maheshwar replied. "He was sedated." He took a small pouch of salts, opened it under Atul's nose, and waited. Atul stirred, blinking groggily.

"I thought you were the incarnation of Hanuman," Maheshwar said dryly. "You showed up like a weakling."

Atul smirked. "I wanted to see what you'd do. That's all."

With a subtle motion, he tensed—and the ropes binding him disintegrated into fibers.

Maheshwar chuckled. "You haven't disappointed me. I wanted to meet Kalki, but you say you're just Kumar. Mr. Kalki, please, sit." He gestured toward a chair.

I sat.

Maheshwar leaned forward. "During the COVID outbreak, we were attacked. A group—possibly desperate for supplies—tried to breach one of the treasure sites. But the forces protecting it dealt with them. We captured one man who claimed to be part of an army led by someone called **Makrasura**."

"Makrasura?" I repeated.

"Yes. He said the name suited his leader—like a crocodile. Quiet, motionless until he strikes. He moves frequently, never staying in one place. Sleeps in a box, which can't be opened from the outside. He compared it to Dracula's coffin."

"Does he go by any other name? We haven't come across 'Makrasura' before."

Maheshwar shrugged. "I don't know. But the captive said someone saw him on TV—standing next to actor Mohsin Khan. The footage was recorded by a TV cameraman, apparently without their knowledge. People started asking if he was Mohsin's brother or his body double—if he'd be replacing him in the next film."

I looked over at Atul, who seemed lost in thought, likely reviewing media archives in his neural system.

He nodded.

That was enough.

I stood and shook Maheshwar's hand. "Thank you. If you come across anything else, please contact us." I handed him my card.

Atul also stood, shook Maheshwar's hand, and we walked out of the cave.

Back at the helicopters, I turned to Atul.

"Head back to the bunker," I said. "I'll return to Hyderabad."

Atul managed to retrieve a photo of **Makrasura** from the old video footage featuring **Mohsin**. It wasn't easy—the video had been wiped from most platforms, and it seemed someone had gone to great lengths to erase every copy. But nothing ever truly disappears from the internet. Atul, with his unparalleled skill, unearthed a preserved version buried in an obscure archive.

When I looked at the photo, Makrasura was everything I expected—and more.

Standing next to Mohsin, he appeared at least three inches taller and far more imposing. His physique was tougher, his posture more commanding. Both of them looked like they had walked out of the pages of an epic—it struck me that they could easily portray **Asuras** in a mythological film.

That gave me an idea.

Why not create a mythological movie featuring the two of them? It would give me the perfect excuse to observe Makrasura closely—upfront and unguarded. The question was: **what story should we tell?**

Should it be **Ramayana**? **Mahabharata**? Or perhaps something more obscure—a **saga focused on the Asuras** themselves, led by figures like **Hiranyakashipu**, **Mahishasura**, or **Shumbha-Nishumbha**? Maybe even a **new-age mythos**, blending past and present to reflect the battle still unfolding today.

I needed to check if we had any manuscripts in our archives that would fit.

Then it hit me—I had **promised Monica** I'd help finance her next film. Why not bring her back from New York and hand over the reins of this project to her?

I glanced at the clock. It was close to **7:00 p.m.** here, which meant it would be **8:30 a.m.** in New York. And being **Saturday**, they'd all likely be home. The last time I dropped Monica off in New York, I hadn't had time to speak with anyone properly—I'd left as soon as I arrived.

I called **Loveleen**.

"I'm heading to New York," I told her. "I want to check in on Monica and discuss a new film idea."

"I'll come with you," she said without hesitation.

And just like that, we stepped into the transporter—and a moment later, we were at our house in New York.

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Atul

From my encounter with Maheshwar, one thing became clear: I have powers—real, tangible powers. Bob had never mentioned this to me, but feeling it for the first time was invigorating. The only thing I seemed to lack was the ability to fly like Hanuman, but even that was compensated for by the advanced gadgets we now possessed.

Later that week, **Nirmala** visited our office and asked for me. The receptionist called to inform me of her arrival. I asked her to share my contact number with Nirmala and told her I'd drop by in the evening.

When I reached the Mumbai office, Nirmala was still there, chatting with **Cathy**. Upon seeing me, she got up and walked over with a bright smile.

“Shall we go to a movie or something?” she asked casually.

I hesitated for a moment. My situation with **Molly** was unclear—she hadn’t contacted me, and I wasn’t sure where we stood. But if Nirmala was showing interest, what was wrong with getting to know her better?

“Sure,” I said. “Why not?”

She smiled. “Great! I already booked the tickets.”

We took one of the company cars and drove to the theatre. As we walked from the parking lot toward the entrance, she slid her hand into mine. The gesture felt natural, intimate.

At the gate, she showed the digital tickets to the attendant, and we entered the complex. She asked for snacks, and I bought them—popcorn, nachos, and two cold drinks. We took our seats in the theatre.

The experience felt surreal. Other than Molly, I had never been close to anyone this way. Nirmala was different. When the lights dimmed, she gently took my hand and placed it on her shoulder. That small gesture spoke volumes—she was making her intentions clear. I followed her lead.

After the movie, we went for dinner at a restaurant in the same complex. We talked easily, laughed a lot, and shared little things about our lives.

Once we were back in the car, I asked, “Where should I drop you?”

“Take me to your flat,” she said softly. “I want to spend more time with you.”

I drove us to our flat in Andheri. I didn't feel comfortable taking her to our Juhu quarters—it felt too formal, too exposed.

We parked, locked the car, and went up to the flat. I opened the door. Everything inside was immaculate, maintained as

if someone had just cleaned it. I made a mental note to find out who had been keeping it so well.

I walked into the bedroom, switched on the air conditioner, and returned to the living room.

“Would you like something to drink?” I asked.

“A cool drink would be nice.”

“We also have some wine. Would you like that instead?”

She raised an eyebrow, amused. “You keep wine here? Do you host parties often?”

“No,” I chuckled. “It’s part of Dad’s collection. I’ve just never cleared it out.”

I brought her a chilled can of soda from the fridge and handed it to her.

She took it, sipped slowly, then looked at me with a coy smile.

It was clear what she wanted. Still, I felt hesitation. My mind was sending mixed signals—past memories overlapping, different timelines bleeding into this one. It was all becoming a blur.

She finished her drink and placed the can on the table. I walked over and stood in front of her. She rose to her feet. I held her gently by the shoulders and looked into her eyes.

There was something in them—warmth, trust, and something deeper. Love? Maybe. I couldn't be sure. But it was enough to push me forward.

I leaned in and kissed her. She responded with passion. This was different from Molly. With Molly, it had always felt eternal, like something that transcended lifetimes. With Nirmala, it was raw and present. Unpredictable. Alive.

As our kiss deepened, I led her into the bedroom.

The cool air from the AC made her shiver, but I felt heat rising within me. She laughed nervously and clung to me for warmth. I guided her gently to the bed, where she fell back, her dress riding up, exposing her underwear.

I sat beside her, placing my hand on her thigh—it felt cool to the touch.

Was it just the AC? Or was there something more I wasn't seeing?

Kumar

We stepped out of the transporter, and **Atul's daughter** came running toward me, calling out, "Grandpa!"

I smiled, scooped her up, and held her close. Her joy was infectious.

From behind, I heard **Molly's voice**: "Who has come?"

Soon, everyone began arriving one by one, greeting me warmly and asking about **India**, each eager for updates and news from home.

When **Monica** appeared, I pulled her aside and explained the situation—my plan to produce a **mythological movie** as a front to observe **Makrasura**, and how I wanted her to **direct it**.

She readily agreed. Monica had grown restless in the US, clearly itching to return to her work. The only issue was how to explain her absence to **Mohsin**.

After some discussion, we settled on a story: we'd tell Mohsin that Monica had met with an **accident** that affected her memory. Over time, she had slowly recovered and now remembered everything—and had finally returned.

We said our goodbyes to everyone and transported back to our **Mumbai office**. As expected, there was **no official record** of Monica living in the U.S. during her absence.

From there, I took her in the company car and dropped her at her house.

Before she stepped out, I asked, “Shall I come in and explain the situation to Mohsin?”

She shook her head. “No need. I’ll handle him. I’ll just tell him that you’re producing our next film and that he can take on **whatever role** he wants. That should calm him down—especially now, with offers drying up since his last film flopped.”

“Alright. If you’re confident, I’ll leave it to you. Just give me a call when you’re free.”

Monica nodded, stepped out of the car, and walked through the gate toward her house.

I waited for a moment, watching her disappear inside, then started the engine and drove back to the office.

About an hour later, I received her call.

“**Mohsin’s agreed,**” she said. “He’s on board with me directing and you producing. He’s excited—this might be the comeback he needs.”

Atul

I felt a little uneasy with her cold touch, but her next action brought the heat to both of us. Nirmala pulled me onto her. I started kissing her from top to bottom. I started behind her ears, which brought in her huge reaction. Then I came down to her throat, from there on to her breast. Slowly I

removed the buttons on the top she is wearing, exposing her bra-clad boobs.

I kissed her on the top of her breasts and the valley of her breasts. I came down to her navel and explored the navel coming down to her flared-up mini she was wearing. I kissed her above the hemline of her undies and explored using my tongue to move her undies down, exposing her skin above the cunt area.

I pulled her undies with my hand and threw them aside. I started exploring her vagina with my tongue. Nirmala arched back with pleasure. I again went up and pulled her bra straps aside and pulled them down to her stomach, exposing her fully formed breasts.

I started playing with my tongue on her nipples one after the other bringing her to pleasure, and she started to moan with pleasure.

I removed my shirt, threw it aside and loosened the belt on my trousers. I let it slide down and stepped out of the trousers. I was in my undies and my dick is trying to break free from it.

I lay on her and started to kiss her and my hand was on her boobs pressing them. Nirmala pulled down my underwear and freed the dick from it. She inserted it into her vagina and I started to move rhythmically and Nirmala moved with the rhythm.

Half an hour of pumping her brought me to climax and she must have had many orgasms. Releasing my semen into her, I rolled aside and lay beside her.

Nirmala pulled a small packet of cigarettes from her purse, handed one to me, and took one for herself.

I lit both using the lighter from the nightstand. We smoked in silence, the only sound in the room the faint hum of the air conditioner.

I lay back on the pillow, staring at the ceiling, lost in thought.

She gently placed her hand on my chest. I closed my eyes, pretending I was drifting off to sleep.

But she wasn't ready to let me off that easily.

"What happened?" she whispered. "I heard you went looking for the soldier who came to visit Grandpa."

I stayed silent, hoping she'd take the hint. Instead, she began softly scratching my chest—her silent protest for an answer.

I sighed. "We met him. But he didn't tell us anything useful."

"So... what are you planning now?"

"Nothing immediate. Kumar's decided to make a movie."

"A movie?" she asked, confused. "How would that help you locate Asur?"

"It's not meant to. I think he just wants to channel his energy elsewhere. Maybe we've got so much money now, he figured he might as well burn some of it."

She laughed softly. "How did you make all this money?"

"Kumar worked for it—used every bit of his brilliance. He came from nothing. I think that drove him. He always said he wanted enough money to last several lifetimes."

What I didn't tell her was the truth: that our wealth came not just from effort and innovation, but from other dimensions—and with the help of Bob, who had supplied us with futuristic blueprints and strategic investments that gave us an overwhelming edge.

"Can you help me with some money?" she asked hesitantly.

I turned my head toward her. "For what?"

"I need to pay someone."

"Who?"

"Someone who's blackmailing me."

My chest tightened. "Why is he blackmailing you?"

She took a breath. "A while back, I was playing truth or dare with some friends. I chose dare. They told me to steal something from a Super Bazar. I slipped a bottle of expensive perfume into my pocket, paid for some small items, and walked out."

She paused, then continued. "One of the security guys saw it on CCTV. He didn't report it—but now he's threatening to expose me unless I pay him."

I stared at the ceiling again, exhaling slowly.

"And you want to pay him?"

"For now. Just to quiet him."

"But you know that's not how blackmail works, right? Once he gets money, he'll keep coming back. You pay once, you're trapped."

"I thought about that. But he's demanding ten lakhs. I thought I'd give him one for now and ask for time."

"And then what? He threatens you again? You can't keep feeding this guy. That's a losing game."

"I don't know what else to do."

"Alright," I said softly. "Let's sleep on it. We'll figure something out in the morning."

But I already had an idea forming. I couldn't let her walk into this alone—or make a mistake she'd regret.

Blackmailers rarely stop once they're paid. They push, escalate, destroy. This guy had to be dealt with—legally and swiftly.

I'd call the police commissioner. He knew Dad and had asked about Kumar recently. If anyone could get this handled discreetly and effectively, it was him.

With that thought, I finally let sleep take me.

I woke up to the soft warmth of Nirmala kissing my cheek.

Opening my eyes, I smiled. "Good morning. You're up already?"

"I made you coffee too," she said, her voice light and affectionate.

"Is there milk in the house?"

"There are a few packets in the deep freezer."

"Good. Now come here and give me a proper kiss."

She leaned in, and we kissed—slow, familiar, comfortable. I sat up and reached for the cup of coffee she'd brought. It was still warm. I took a slow sip, letting the quiet morning settle in.

After getting ready, I dropped Nirmala at her place and drove straight to the office.

Once settled, I made a call to the **Mumbai Police Commissioner**. I explained Nirmala's situation, telling him I suspected that the man blackmailing her might be involved in a broader pattern of misconduct—possibly even **recording bathroom footage** and using it to extort other victims. That, I believed, would warrant deeper investigation.

Later, I called **Kumar** for an update.

"She's managed to smooth things over with Mohsin," Kumar said, referring to Monica. "At least he's agreed to act in our film. We'll have to see how she handles getting **Asur** involved."

"Good. I also reached out to the Commissioner regarding Nirmala's issue."

"What did you find?"

"It's looking like she was pulled into something unsavoury. A man is blackmailing her, and I suspect he's done this before—possibly to others too."

"If it's blackmail, let the police handle it. Don't let it distract you too much. What else is going on?"

"I'm staying in Mumbai for now—at least until Nirmala's issue is settled."

"Fair enough. I'll be coordinating with Monica to move the film into production. We need to get things rolling soon."

"Alright. Also, Loveleen invited me to dinner tonight."

"Perfect. Bring Nirmala along—she'll be happy to meet her."

"I'll let her know."

We ended the call, and I rang **Nirmala**.

"I'm working on resolving your situation," I told her. "Also, Dad invited us to dinner tonight. Are you free to come?"

"I'd love to meet him," she said. "Will you pick me up?"

"Of course. I'll come by in the evening."

After the call, I transported myself to the **bunker** and started going through some of the recent surveillance footage—looking for any sign of movement,

communication patterns, or connections that could lead us closer to **Asur** or those around him.

It was **8:00 p.m.** when I arrived at **Nirmala's house** to pick her up for dinner.

The place was in **complete darkness**. I rang the doorbell—once, twice, then several more times. No response.

I stepped back and looked around the house, trying to catch any sign of movement. Still nothing. I pulled out my phone and called her. The automated voice came through:

"The number you are trying to reach is currently not reachable."

That was unusual. If she had a change in plans, she would've at least messaged me. Something felt off.

Concerned, I walked around the house looking for any indication of what might've happened. As I reached the back door leading to the kitchen, I noticed it was **unlocked—and slightly ajar**.

A chill ran down my spine.

I immediately called the **Commissioner**. "Nirmala's missing," I said. "Her house is locked up front, but the back door is open. Something's wrong."

"Stay where you are," he instructed. "Do not enter the house. I'll send a CID team right away. Wait near the front gate."

I waited in silence for what felt like forever. Finally, about **thirty minutes later**, a CID unit arrived and entered the house through the back door.

The **Sub-Inspector** came out after a brief search. “We’re launching a full investigation. It’s best you return home. We’ll keep you informed once we find anything.”

Reluctantly, I left the scene and headed home. Once there, I updated **Kumar** about what had happened.

He immediately called the **bunker** and instructed the tech team to check CCTV footage from the surrounding area. Maybe we could find something—any indication of where she’d gone, or who had taken her.

“Let’s see what they uncover,” he said grimly.

Just then, **Loveleen** appeared and announced that dinner was ready. But I had no appetite. I sat at the table, pushing the food around silently. No one forced me to eat—they understood.

The Next Morning

I woke early, still restless. After getting ready, I transported myself to the **bunker**.

“Any updates?” I asked as soon as I arrived.

Gopal looked up from the monitors, shaking his head. “We’ve searched all logical locations. There’s no clue. It’s like she **vanished into thin air**.”

His words lodged a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. Something didn’t add up.

I transported to our **Mumbai house**, picked up a car, and drove back to **Nirmala’s home**. A police constable was still stationed outside. I requested access, and after calling his superior, he allowed me inside.

This time, I was **methodical**, combing through every room, every corner, looking for anything out of place.

Then I found it.

Hidden behind a false panel in a closet was a **transporter**—not one of ours. It looked sleeker, less robust, and ran on a different frequency band. It wasn't manufactured by us or any of our authorized partners. Worse, it showed **no active or saved location data**.

I immediately called Kumar.

"I found a transporter in Nirmala's house," I told him. "But it's not ours—it's from someone else. The coordinates are blank, possibly reset after use."

"That changes things," Kumar replied. "What do you think it means?"

"I'm starting to think she wasn't kidnapped. She may have **left deliberately**. If you think back, she was the one who directed us to Maheshwar's location. Maybe they were counting on him or his men to kill me. And when that didn't work, she shifted tactics. Her sudden closeness afterward—it felt... off. This could mean she was associated with **Asur** all along."

Kumar paused before answering. "It's possible. If she used that transporter, she could be anywhere. Can you extract any other data?"

"I'll try, but it looks like the transporter auto-wipes destination data after use. I'll do another sweep of the house just in case."

"Alright. Let me know if you find anything else."

"Will do."

I scoured the rest of the house with a fine-tooth comb. But beyond the transporter, there was **nothing**—no documents, no digital devices, no traces of departure.

I left the house, transported home, and then returned to the **bunker** to continue our search from the operations center.

Chapter 5

Kumar

rom my conversation with **Atul**, it was becoming clear: while we were searching for **Asur**, someone was manipulating the situation behind the scenes—possibly even manipulating us. But to what extent? That was still uncertain.

Just then, **Loveleen** appeared in the doorway.

“Lunch is ready,” she said.

Over Lunch

As we sat at the table, I told Loveleen what Atul had discovered in **Nirmala’s house**—the hidden transporter and her sudden disappearance.

“You think Nirmala’s connected to Asur’s family?” she asked.

“I don’t know what else to think,” I replied. “Why would she have an unauthorized transporter? Why guide Atul to Maheshwar’s camp? Why seduce him afterward?”

“Or maybe she genuinely cared for Atul,” Loveleen countered. “Maybe she wanted to help us and they— whoever *they* are—found out. Maybe they took her for going against them.”

I paused. “You think she’s a victim, not an accomplice?”

"She *could* be," she said gently. "You're looking at her from a lens of betrayal. Atul might be doing the same. But sometimes people are caught in between. That doesn't make them traitors."

I considered her words in silence. She wasn't wrong. But facts were facts—and the transporter wasn't there by accident.

As I finished eating, the **phone rang**. I picked it up.

It was the **Commissioner**.

"We've found no evidence that Nirmala was kidnapped," he said. "But we're actively investigating the blackmail complaint. If anything turns up, I'll inform you."

"Thanks, Commissioner. Let me know if there's anything we can assist with."

"Of course. We'll be in touch."

Office Visit

"I'm heading to the office," I told Loveleen.

Once there, I settled into my cabin. A few minutes later, **Kathy** arrived with a stack of files for my signature.

"Sir, I need a few minutes of your time. These files require your approval."

"Sure, Kathy. Sit down and walk me through them."

She explained each document as I reviewed and signed them. As she stood up to leave, I stopped her.

"Kathy, one more thing."

"Yes, sir?"

"It's about Nirmala. How do you know her?"

"She's my childhood friend," Kathy said, smiling faintly. "We grew up in the same neighbourhood and attended school together. After tenth grade, my family moved to Mumbai, and she went on to do her MBBS in Chennai. Later, she came to Mumbai for her MS. We always kept in touch."

"You offered her to stay with you, right?"

"Yes. But she said a relative had given her a house to stay in. She even invited us to visit on weekends. It was cozy. We'd often hang out there."

"Did she ever talk to you about Atul?"

Kathy smiled. "Yes. She really liked him—his attitude, his calm confidence, his hacking skills, his charm. She was drawn to him."

"You think her feelings were genuine?"

"I believe so. At your wedding, when she met him, something clicked. She talked about him often."

I nodded, absorbing this information.

"You all went to her grandfather's place in Tamil Nadu, right?"

"Yes. Her grandfather runs a **nature care clinic**. He's a wonderful person. Doesn't charge patients—he survives on donations from wealthier people who believe in his work."

"What about **Maheshwar**? The soldier who visited the clinic?"

Kathy looked puzzled. "That's his name? We didn't know. Nirmala only mentioned that some men had come to consult her grandfather while she was home for the holidays."

"Thanks for clarifying. We're thinking of visiting her grandfather again."

"I'd be happy to come along," she offered.

"Good. Be ready by 4 p.m."

To Tamil Nadu

By 4:15, we reached the **Chennai office**, took a company car to the airport, and boarded the helicopter waiting for us. Kumar's decision to set up the office near the airport had proved to be more than convenient.

The pilot already had the coordinates of Nirmala's grandfather's clinic. He landed smoothly in the open field beside the building.

Hearing the chopper, **Nirmala's grandparents** came outside.

Upon seeing Kathy, her grandfather asked, "Kathy, what happened? We've been trying to reach Nirmala, but she isn't answering."

"I thought she'd come to visit you," Kathy replied, glancing at me for support.

I stepped forward. "We're here because we haven't been able to contact her either. When Atul went to pick her up for dinner at our house, she was missing. We're not sure if she left on her own or if something happened to her."

Her grandfather looked shaken. "She would never leave without informing someone. Are you saying she might have been kidnapped?"

"We can't rule it out. Do you know which relative offered her the house in Mumbai?"

Grandfather turned to Grandma. "Do you know of any relatives who gave her a place to stay?"

She shook her head. “I thought she was staying in a hostel with Kathy.”

Kathy looked equally surprised. “That’s what she told me—she said a relative offered her a house. She never mentioned staying alone.”

Her grandparents’ faces turned pale. “We’ve been her guardians ever since her parents passed away. Please... find out what happened to her.”

“We will,” I assured them. “The police are investigating. We’ll do everything we can to bring her back safely.”

We returned to the helicopter in silence and flew back to Chennai, the weight of uncertainty pressing heavier than before.

Atul

Dad called me earlier in the day to explain what he had learned about **Nirmala**.

It offered some relief—at least she hadn’t tried to deceive me. But that relief quickly gave way to a deeper, more gnawing concern: if she didn’t leave willingly, then someone must have taken her.

If she was **kidnapped** from her house, **who did it—and why?**

When I found the **transporter** in her home, my first assumption had been that *she* used it—possibly to escape or return to her handlers. But what if I had it all wrong? What if it was never her transporter to begin with?

What if **her abductors** had installed it there, using it solely for their convenience—an easy way in and out without leaving a trace?

Why didn't I think of that earlier?

Worse yet, why didn't I check for **available destination logs** on the transporter before leaving the house?

The answer came to me, sharp and shameful: I was angry. Angry at her supposed betrayal. Furious that she had played me, or so I thought. But she hadn't. Her feelings had been real. And I—blinded by suspicion—had let emotion cloud my judgment.

There's an old saying: *Once bitten, twice shy*. Maybe that's what happened. When someone gets burned by love or trust, they build walls, and any kindness looks like a trap. Maybe I projected my past fears onto her.

I had to make it right—at least **try**.

If the transporter was still there, I could still check its internal log—**trace where it had last connected**.

Without wasting another second, I went to security, collected the house keys, and drove to **Nirmala's residence**.

By the time I arrived, the sun had vanished behind the western sea, and her house stood silent, wrapped in darkness.

I approached the **back entrance**, inserted the key into the lock, and stepped inside.

The kitchen light flickered to life. The room was still in a **state of disarray**, just as it had been when we first discovered her missing.

I moved quickly toward the room where I'd originally found the **transporter**.

I opened the door, flipped on the light—and froze.

The **transporter was gone**.

The space where it once stood was now empty. Dust marks on the floor and faint impressions told the story: someone had come, removed it, and vanished without a trace.

I stood there, staring at the void, realization sinking in like a stone.

Now I had no way to track where she went. No transporter, no log, no clue.

She was out there somewhere.

And I had just **lost my best lead.**

Kumar

When **Atul called** to inform me that the **transporter at Nirmala's house** had been removed, I immediately contacted **Gopal**.

"Check the **CCTV footage** from the area," I told him. "That transporter couldn't have vanished without being loaded into some kind of vehicle."

As I ended the call, my thoughts shifted to Atul. His emotional response to Nirmala's disappearance was... uncharacteristic. I never thought he would be so **deeply affected**. He'd always been logical—focused.

A Private Conversation

I walked into the **bedroom**, where **Loveleen** sat reading a magazine on the bed. I picked up a chair and sat across from her. She looked at me questioningly, lowering her book.

"It's about Atul," I said quietly.

She set the magazine aside. "Tell me."

“He’s... taking Nirmala’s disappearance to heart. Much more than I expected.”

“That’s natural,” she replied softly. “Especially after Molly and his daughter were sent to the **USA**.”

“I know. We had to make that decision—for their safety. If enemies were going to strike, they’d target our families.”

“You were right to protect them,” Loveleen said. “But did you ever stop to think how much that would affect him **emotionally**? You sent away the two most important people in his life.”

“I assumed he’d visit them if he needed to.”

“But he couldn’t. **Security protocols** prevented it, and you know that. You’ve visited them a few times—did you ever think to give Atul updates? Ease his mind?”

I sighed. “I should have. But I didn’t want to distract him. I figured, if he wanted to know, he’d ask.”

Loveleen paused, thinking. “What’s done is done. Let’s focus on what we can do now. Are you **certain** Nirmala was kidnapped?”

“Yes. There’s no other plausible explanation. If she had gone willingly, she would have **reached out**—at least to **Atul**. Or to her **grandparents**. They raised her after her parents died. She knew they’d worry.”

“You’re right,” she nodded. “Even if she couldn’t talk to Atul, she would have contacted her grandparents.”

The Larger Picture

“So,” Loveleen asked, “what are you going to do about Atul?”

"I'm thinking of giving him some space. Let him process this in his own way. If he channels it into his work, it might even help us."

"I agree. Maybe his search for Nirmala will lead us to Asur eventually."

"Possibly."

She looked at me thoughtfully. "Is there any chance **Monica** will cast him in her film?"

"She hasn't told me anything directly," I said. "But I know she's pushing **Mohsin** to get **Asur** to act in the film. Mohsin wants a larger-than-life villain to balance his role as the hero. She sees Asur as that figure."

Loveleen raised an eyebrow. "You think Asur would agree to act in a movie?"

"If it serves his purpose—**exposure, influence**, maybe a way to mask his operations—I wouldn't put it past him."

"If that's true, then Monica might lead us right to him."

"Exactly. If we monitor the progress of the film and how they approach casting, we might catch something."

"I'll ask Gopal to **increase surveillance** around the house in the forest. That might be their base—or at least a temporary location."

"Do it," I said. "This might be the lead we've been waiting for."

Atul

I reached the **bunker** and immediately asked Gopal what he was working on.

He looked up from his monitors. “I’m reviewing **CCTV footage** from around **Nirmala’s house**, trying to identify anyone who might have moved the transporter.”

“Good. Also check for any **chatter or digital trails** related to her.”

Gopal nodded. “Kumar asked me to monitor the **forest house footage** for any communication concerning Nirmala.”

“Find anything yet?”

“I passed the footage on to **Manish** for a deeper scan. He hasn’t reported back yet.”

“All right. I’ll follow up with him. Anything else I should know?”

“Nothing for now. I’ll let you know the moment something turns up.”

“Okay. I’m heading back to **Mumbai**—I’ll check in with the **Commissioner**. Maybe he can help.”

Back at the Mumbai office, I called the **Police Commissioner** and requested a meeting. He sounded distracted.

“I’m on my way to meet the CM. There’s unrest brewing in some districts—might escalate into full-blown riots. I don’t know how long the meeting will take.”

“Understood. If there’s anything we can do to assist, don’t hesitate.”

“I’ll reach out once we know more.”

I hung up and leaned back in my chair, unsettled. This unrest—was it the opposition at play? Or worse—**was Asur involved?**

Lately, his influence seemed to seep into every dark corner of the nation's instability.

As I sat there, my mind drifted—**back to Nirmala**, and that night we shared. It had been my first night with someone after the **merger**, and it was unforgettable. Intense. Emotionally charged. The kind of night that left a mark.

The memory lulled me into sleep.

I woke to darkness. For a few seconds, I was disoriented. Day or night?

A glance at the clock—**6:45 p.m.** I'd fallen asleep thinking about Nirmala.

I realized I hadn't eaten. I walked to the kitchen, found some pre-cooked food, reheated it, brewed tea, and sat down.

My **earpiece buzzed**—Gopal calling. The device had been on **DND** while I slept.

"Your line wasn't accepting calls," he said.

"Was sleeping. What's up? Any news on Nirmala?"

"No update on her directly, but we spotted a **small van** transporting the **transporter unit** from her house. We've traced the license plate and are following up."

"Good. Keep me posted. Anything from the **forest house**?"

"No. It's eerily quiet. Either they've abandoned it or they've created a **looped surveillance signal** to fake inactivity."

"Better send someone for **physical recon**—just to be sure."

"Already in the works."

“One more thing,” he added, “we noticed **suspicious activity** near the **Juhu office** and some residential areas. Possibly surveillance.”

“Has Kumar been informed?”

“Not yet. We wanted to confirm first, no point alarming him prematurely.”

“Fair enough. Keep me in the loop.”

I finished dinner, my thoughts circling back to **Nirmala**. Was she safe? Was she getting food? I remembered what **Dad** once said about **Joy**, who was held in darkness and fed through a slit in the door when she was kidnapped by **Dolly’s gang**. She barely survived. Nirmala... I prayed she wasn’t enduring the same fate.

At the Office

I walked back into the office. Surprisingly, **Kathy** was still at her desk.

“You’re still here?”

“I wanted to finish some things. I’m going on **leave** starting tomorrow.”

“Who’s covering for you?”

“A girl from the **Hyderabad branch**. Her name’s **Sravanthi**. Kumar sir appointed her.”

“Need help with anything?”

“These documents need a second look. They’re for the movie Kumar sir is producing.”

“Let me see.”

I sat down and reviewed the documents thoroughly, marking corrections and suggestions. It took about 30 minutes.

"Thanks," she said. "You always catch the small details."

"So... where are you headed on leave?"

"**Chennai**. My family's looking at matches for me."

"So you're coming back **after marriage**?"

She smiled. "Maybe. Depends on the in-laws."

"Well, you better invite us. I'll need time to buy you a gift."

"No need for gifts. Just having you attend would be enough."

"Oh? Then no gift it is."

She laughed. "Not so fast. I'll make sure you give me something nice."

I offered to drop her off, and she hesitated but eventually agreed.

We walked to the **parking lot**, located the car, and I held the door open for her.

"Where to? Your hostel?"

"No, my aunt's place. She's giving me dresses for the groom's visit. She'll come to Chennai with me."

"You're taking the transporter?"

"Of course. My aunt was scared initially, now she swears by it."

As we neared the building, she directed, "Take a left, stop there."

Meeting Kathy's Aunt

I parked. Kathy invited me up for coffee. I considered, then agreed.

We rode the **lift to the 14th floor**, and Kathy rang the bell.

A woman in her forties opened the door.

"You must be Atul," she smiled. "Kathy's told me about you."

"All good things, I hope."

"She mentioned **Nirmala**. We knew her when she was younger. I hope you find her."

"I hope so too."

"She was supposed to meet Kumar and Loveleen for dinner," Kathy added. "Atul's been taking it hard."

Her aunt nodded solemnly. "If she's missing, I hope it's not something serious."

"She was likely kidnapped," Kathy said softly.

We sat. Kathy's aunt offered me **coffee**, then quietly went into the kitchen. I overheard her whisper, "Why don't you ask him to stay for dinner?"

Kathy replied, "He already ate and came to work."

She returned and sat across from me.

"I know she'll come back," she said quietly. "I just feel it."

"I hope you're right."

Her aunt returned with a cup. I took a sip. "One of the best coffees I've had."

I stood. "I should head out. See you tomorrow?"

"Yes. I'll introduce you to **Sravanthi**. She'll be working here permanently."

"You're not returning?"

"I might. Depends on how things go after marriage. You know how in-laws can be."

"If they give you any trouble, just let me know."

She smiled. "I doubt it'll come to that."

Strange Encounter

As I stepped into the corridor, I heard **loud music** nearby.

"That's the **paying guest flat**," Kathy explained. "Owner lets it out."

As we walked toward the lift, two young men came out of that unit and stood behind me.

Once inside the lift, one said to the other, "So Kathy's moving to Chennai. Getting married soon, huh?"

I turned. "You know Kathy?"

"Yes," he replied. "We borrow stuff from her—salt, sugar. She's nice. Who are you?"

"I'm her boss."

"You're her boss? So young?"

"She meant **my dad**—Kumar. He's the one who just married."

Their expressions shifted.

"I'm **Atul**, by the way."

"I'm **Abhijith**, this is **Pankaj**."

"Nice to meet you."

I stepped out, waved goodbye, and got into my car. I started the engine and drove off—my mind not just on work, but on **what lay ahead**.

Nirmala

Scene: Nirmala's Interrogation and Escape

I opened my eyes with difficulty. I'd been tied to a chair for four days, sustained only by water and some kind of nutrient-rich liquid. My limbs were stiff, my head pounding with hunger and fatigue.

A man sat across from me—massive, at least seven feet tall. His physique would put any movie star to shame. Even **Maheshwar** would seem small next to him.

He spoke again, for what felt like the hundredth time.

“What is Kumar's plan?”

“I don't know,” I replied, voice dry. **“I've never even met him.”**

“You were at his wedding. I've seen the pictures.”

“I went with friends. I don't know him or his family personally.”

He leaned forward, eyes narrowing. **“Then why did you take them to your grandfather?”**

“You mean Atul? He wanted advice about his mother's health.”

“What happened to her?”

“He said she had cancer.”

“Can your grandfather cure cancer?”

"If not cure, he can at least prolong life with herbal treatments."

"So, you took him for medicine."

"Yes. Nothing else."

He smirked, unconvinced. **"Then why the movie date? The dinner? Staying the night at his place?"**

My instincts screamed to lie, to fabricate. But I remembered my grandfather's words: **"Don't lie. Lies demand more lies. Sooner or later, you'll trip on your own tongue."**

So, I leaned into a twisted truth.

"I was attracted to him. You know how it is—we're young, impulsive. I wanted to spend the night with him. He's charming and... a great lover."

He gave a slow, dark grin. **"Is that so? And what do you think of me?"**

"I don't know. You seem... rough."

"You're right. None of my lovers lived to tell the tale."

"Are you trying to scare me? Then, yes, I'm scared."

"You don't look it."

"My parents didn't raise a scarecrow."

A beat passed. Then, quietly, he said, **"I heard your parents died in an accident."**

I tensed. **"So?"**

"Do you know how that happened?"

"They died in a car crash. That's all I know."

"What do you remember from that time?"

"I was a year old. I remember nothing."

He smiled faintly. **“That’s... convenient.”**

“Why are you talking like that?”

“Forget it. Tell me about Kumar and his team.”

“I’ve told you—I know nothing about their operations.”

“Then go find out. Work for me.”

“Why would I? I have no reason to betray them.”

“I’ll give you a reason—the truth about your parents. Everything.”

I hesitated. That was my weakness, and he knew it.

“You’re saying their deaths weren’t accidental?”

“I’ll tell you what really happened—when you’ve completed your work.”

I looked him dead in the eyes. **“Fine. I’ll find out what I can. But first, untie me.”**

He glanced at a man standing nearby, who silently approached and cut the ropes binding my wrists and ankles. Blood rushed back into my limbs as I stood up, massaging my arms and legs.

I walked a few steps, regaining balance, then returned to face the giant.

“What now?”

“Go back. Say you had an accident, lost your memory, and only just regained it. Make it believable.”

He handed me a small object. **“This is a mind-controlled communication device. Looks like an earbud. Blend it into your ear and keep in contact.”**

“You expect me to spy for you using this?”

“Yes. Once your task is complete, I’ll tell you everything. After that, you’re free to go. You can even return to your old house.”

I hesitated. **“Can I at least have a car?”**

“Choose one from the garage. Security will hand over the keys.”

“And something to eat? I haven’t eaten properly in days.”

The man beside him disappeared through a door, returning moments later with **a packet of sandwiches** and **a bottle of juice**.

“Anything else?” I asked, eyeing the food.

He said nothing. Just stared. Either he was mute or forbidden to speak in his master’s presence.

I ate the sandwiches slowly, sipping juice between bites, then tossed the empty packet aside.

“Can I leave now? And by the way—what’s your name?”

The giant leaned back slightly.

“You can call me... Ananth.”

“Alright. Bye, Ananth.”

I turned and followed the silent man outside. He handed me a set of keys. With a click, a car lit up nearby.

I climbed into the driver’s seat. The gates swung open.

And just like that, I drove away—free, but far from safe.

Atul

Scene: Nirmala Returns – Sravanthi Joins

I got ready and headed to the office to take charge for the day and hand things over to the new assistant, Sravanthi.

As I entered the office premises, Kathy approached with a **stunningly beautiful girl** beside her. I found myself momentarily frozen, staring. Her elegance, poise, and the magnetism in her gaze were enough to stop anyone in their tracks. Kathy had to call my name a few times to snap me out of it.

"Yes, Kathy?"

"Sir, this is the new assistant, Sravanthi. She's joining us today."

Sravanthi extended her hand. Her fingers were cool, possibly from sitting in the AC. Her eyes held an unusual depth—inviting, enchanting.

"Glad to meet you, sir," she said.

"Glad to meet you too. What are your qualifications?"

"I completed my degree and then did an MBA in HR."

"From Chennai?"

"Yes, sir."

"You don't need to say 'sir' in every sentence. Just call me Atul."

"Yes, sir."

I sighed.

"Did you take over from Kathy already? She'll be away for some time—we're not sure how long."

"Yes. I've got everything under control."

"It's not about managing. We'll just miss Kathy around here."

"I'll do my best to fill the gap."

Kathy smiled, waved goodbye, and walked toward the transporter to leave for Chennai.

As Sravanthi and I turned to head toward my office, I heard an unexpected voice call out behind me.

"Atul!"

I turned—and froze.

Nirmala was walking toward me quickly, her eyes wide and brimming with emotion. Before I could process anything, she threw her arms around me and kissed my cheek. She noticed Sravanthi standing nearby and hesitated.

I held her face in my hands.

"Where did you disappear to? I was so worried. I've been searching everywhere for you."

"I'll tell you everything—just take me to your cabin first."

Sravanthi, clearly understanding the tension in the moment, offered a polite nod.

"I'll be in my cabin," she said and walked off.

Nirmala pulled me into my cabin, shut the door, and kissed me—this time deeply, passionately. I returned the kiss but gently pulled back.

"Tell me what happened."

She sat down, still catching her breath.

"I was getting ready to come meet you that night. Then... someone hit me on the head. When I woke up, I was in some farmhouse. At first, I had no memory of who I was or where I was. The watchman told me I'd wandered in with amnesia."

She looked away, eyes misty.

"I slowly started remembering things. Faces. Feelings. And then, everything returned. I rushed here the moment I could. I'm sorry I missed our meeting with Kumar and Loveleen."

"You don't need to call them sir or madam. You're part of the family now. We'll visit them together tonight."

"There was a feeling," she continued. "Even when I didn't remember anything, I *felt* I was missing something—*someone*. That feeling kept me restless. Your love pulled me back."

I kissed her softly.

"Go home, get some rest. I'll pick you up this evening."

As she left, she paused by Sravanthi's cabin, casting a quick glance inside.

They say love is blind—but I now realize it can be deaf and dumb too.

Later That Afternoon

Sravanthi returned to my cabin with some files. I was buried in work until 4 p.m. when I suddenly remembered the plan to take Nirmala to meet Kumar and Loveleen.

I called Kumar and explained the situation. He agreed to schedule the meeting and said he'd coordinate with Loveleen.

I went to inform Sravanthi.

She was typing rapidly, clearly deep in focus.

"I'm heading to the Island Bunker," I told her.

She stood up and picked up her bag.

"I'm coming with you. Kumar sir told me not to leave you alone."

"Why? What could happen to me?"

"He told me to follow you like a shadow," she said, smiling.

I shrugged. **"Alright, let's go then."**

We stepped into the transporter and arrived at the **Island Bunker**, stepping into a control room filled with monitoring screens showing feeds from around the world.

Sravanthi gasped. **"Wow. This setup is incredible. How much does all this cost?"**

"Hard to say. But Dad paid about a million dollars to develop this system with our associates."

"That's a steal for something like this. Where do the feeds come from?"

"Global surveillance agreements. We store and manage the data, and provide retrieval on request."

She pointed at a series of screens.

"And those cameras?"

"They monitor international borders. There's a dual-layer system. One camera visibly moves, while a second, static camera covers the blind spots. It's designed to trap intruders."

"So the country's safety is in your hands?"

"No, in our defence forces' hands. We just support them."

At that moment, **Gopal** arrived, noticing Sravanthi.

"Gopal, meet Sravanthi, my new PA."

"Nice to meet you, ma'am."

"Just Sravanthi is fine."

"Sir," Gopal began, "we've detected anomalies in Pakistan's feed. They're possibly diverting or scrambling some areas."

"Call our contact in Dubai. Let them know if they don't comply, we'll cancel the contract."

"Is that wise?"

"Who else will take their data? They'll be back. No one else has this kind of storage infrastructure."

"Got it. I'll warn them."

"Also, are you monitoring Nirmala's house?"

"Yes. Today she returned in a new car registered to an Ananth Muthusamy."

"Keep watching. Her story feels rehearsed. She might've been coached... or threatened. Still, she seemed genuinely happy."

Return to Office

Back at the office, I told Sravanthi she could go home for the day and returned to my cabin to get ready for dinner with Nirmala and the family.

Scene: Dinner with Family – A Night with Nirmala

I reached Nirmala's house around 7 p.m. When I rang the bell, she opened the door, pulled me inside, and quickly shut it behind me.

Without a word, she kissed me and gestured for me to sit on the sofa, then disappeared into the bedroom.

Five minutes later, she returned and took me with her. The bedroom was dimly lit, a soft spotlight casting a glow over the bed. She turned to me and kissed me again—this time, with a passion that said more than words ever could. There was urgency, longing, and unspoken emotion in it. Her kiss told me she had missed me deeply.

45 Minutes Later...

I pulled away gently.

“Go get ready—we’re running late. Mom and Dad are waiting for us.”

“Just a minute,” she said, heading to the bathroom.

After a few minutes, I peeked inside.

“Come on, we’re getting late.”

“Let me finish properly. Do you want me to show up like *this*?”

“They’ll understand we had... a workout.”

“You say things like this in front of your parents?”

“No, only in front of you.”

“Five more minutes.”

In reality, it took her another half hour to get ready. After trying on one outfit, she wasn’t satisfied.

“Why don’t you try a saree?” I asked.

“That’ll take another hour. You willing to wait?”

“Just come as you are, you look great.”

“You sure?”

“Absolutely. I’ll be in the car.”

We arrived home around 9:35 p.m. As I was about to ring the bell, the door opened. Loveleen stood smiling, Kumar right behind her. Loveleen gave us a playful look, as though she knew exactly what had delayed us.

Nirmala greeted them politely.

“Namaste, Loveleen madam. Namaste, Kumar sir.”

I leaned over and whispered, **“Didn’t I tell you not to call them sir and madam?”**

“Can’t call them uncle and aunty—they look way too young.”

Loveleen waved it off. **“It’s fine. Come on in. Dinner is ready.”**

At the Table

Nirmala asked, **“Why did you smile like that earlier, Loveleen?”**

Loveleen chuckled. **“I was just reminded of something. Remember, Kumar? When you brought Nishitha and Ram to my place to talk about their marriage? Your mom had suspected they were already involved—said she saw a glow on Nishitha’s face. I saw that same glow on Nirmala’s face today.”**

Nirmala blushed and looked down, hiding a smile.

“Don’t be shy,” Loveleen said warmly. **“It’s obvious you two were made for each other.”**

Nirmala turned to Kumar. **“I heard Atul was married before and has a daughter?”**

Kumar replied, **“That was another life. It’s behind him now. It won’t affect your future together.”**

That moment of reassurance settled something deep inside me. Molly, my daughter... they were part of a different timeline—gone, yet preserved in memory. But now, things were changing. I looked at Nirmala, and she gave me a smile of understanding.

Post-Dinner Discussion

We moved to the living room. The news was on.

The anchor announced: **“In a surprise development, Ajit Pawar has split from his party and joined the Shinde faction. He’s been offered the Deputy CM post. His group is expected to gain several ministries.”**

Loveleen said casually, **“Now they’ll replace Shinde. One of the deputies will be the new CM.”**

“How do you know?” Nirmala asked.

“Kumar pulled a similar move for my father.”

“Did it work?”

“Absolutely. First Deputy CM, then CM after nudging the incumbent into retirement.”

“What’s his name?”

“Rajveer Khanna.”

“Never heard of him being CM. When was this?”

“In 1992.”

“But... what was your age then?”

“Twenty-four.”

“And now?”

“Twenty-five.”

Nirmala blinked. **“So you’ve only aged a year in all this time?”**

“Not me—just my memories from different timelines.”

She looked at her glass for a second, puzzled. Then nodded.

“I don’t quite get it, but... looking at you, I believe you.”

I checked the time—11:30 p.m.

“Time to drop Nirmala home,” I said, rising.

As we walked to the car, Kumar added, **“I heard Kathy’s aunt had an accident—broke her hand.”**

“How is she managing?”

“Some neighbor boys are helping.”

“I think I met them. Good kids. I’ll check on her tomorrow.”

Back at Nirmala’s House

We reached her house in about half an hour.

“Want to come in for coffee?” she asked.

I hesitated. I had a full day ahead. But something in her voice told me she needed company.

“Alright, let me park.”

She opened the gate, and I drove in.

Inside, I sat on the sofa, scanning the room. It looked exactly like the time I’d searched it. Still, something about her felt different—tense.

She brought the coffee and sat across from me.

"You're looking at me strangely," she said.

"I'm just worried. You seem off... anxious."

"I'm fine. Just thinking about my grandparents. They've been so worried, and I don't know how to reassure them."

"I'll talk to them."

We sipped our coffee in silence.

After a few moments, she set her cup down.

"There's something else. My grandma's pushing for me to get married soon."

"You heard Kumar—there's nothing standing in our way. We'll get married. But first, we have a mission to complete."

"What mission?"

"We need to restore balance to the world. It's heading toward chaos. One man—just one—is responsible for stirring it all up. We must find and stop him."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Not yet. We don't know what he looks like, or even where he is. But we know he exists—and he's dangerous."

"What is he trying to do?"

"We think he wants to trigger a global war. A third world war. So far, we've delayed him—but he's getting stronger. He may even have access to the same tech we have."

"So you're not scared of him?"

"No. If I feared every dark force out there, I wouldn't be able to do what I do."

I stood up to leave.

“Why not stay for a little while longer?” she said softly. **“I’ve been feeling... watched. Like someone is following me.”**

“Alright,” I said. **“I’ll stay the night.”**

Scene: A Morning with Nirmala, and the Movie Muhurat Event

I opened my eyes to unfamiliar surroundings. Then it hit me—I had stayed back at Nirmala’s house. I looked beside me. She was still sleeping, looking effortlessly beautiful and serene. I kissed her gently and got up to use the washroom.

Returning, I sat on the bed, my back against the headboard. What’s troubling Nirmala? What is she most afraid of?

As I studied her face, I noticed a subtle frown. Was she having nightmares? Should I ask her? Would she even tell me?

Suddenly, I felt a kiss on my cheek. Startled, I turned to find Nirmala awake. I hadn’t noticed her wake up. Or had she been awake already and watching me? Why was I even having such thoughts? Why this constant doubt?

She got up and said, **“I’ll get you some coffee,”** then walked toward the kitchen.

I found myself watching her sway as she walked—her graceful movements, the way her hips moved. Was she doing that to tease me? Impress me? Or was I just

overthinking everything because I couldn't shake the suspicion about her kidnapping... or that transporter found in her house?

She returned with the coffee.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Here's your coffee."

Oddly, I hadn't noticed any delay. Something's off with me—why am I being so paranoid?

I took a sip, still observing her carefully.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"As if you're analyzing me."

"No, I'm just admiring you. You're stunning."

"You really think I'm beautiful?"

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

She smiled playfully. **"More beautiful than your mom, Loveleen?"**

"Loveleen isn't my biological mom. Sneha is. Loveleen is my stepmom."

"Do you have any step-siblings?"

"Yes. Dhruv—Loveleen's son. He's my stepbrother."

"Wait... the Dhruv who went to Mars?"

"Yes, that Dhruv."

"But Loveleen doesn't look old enough to be his mother."

"We told you last night—these are lives from different timelines."

"Like your previous marriage and your daughter?"

"Exactly. I haven't seen them in over a year."

"Where are they now?"

"Dad sent them to New York for their safety. My uncle's looking after them."

"Is your uncle also... young like your dad?"

"No, he's a regular guy. Over fifty."

She looked thoughtful. **"So your wife and daughter are hidden away... all because of security threats?"**

"Yes. Dad didn't want them targeted."

Just then, my phone rang. It was Dad.

"Where are you?"

"I stayed at Nirmala's place. She was feeling anxious."

"Okay. Listen, Monica's movie muhurat is today. She wants us to attend. I'll be introduced as the producer."

"Got it. What time?"

"12:25 p.m. Don't be late."

"We'll be there. Bye."

Nirmala looked up. **"What happened?"**

"Dad wants us to attend Monica's film launch. Let's stop by the office first, check on things, and then go."

"Okay. I'll go get ready."

As she walked away, I couldn't help but notice again how elegantly she moved. Was I overanalyzing everything? Why did I still feel unsure?

A While Later

It took her nearly an hour to get ready. When she returned, she saw me still in the room.

“You’re not ready?”

“I don’t have a change of clothes here. Need to stop at my place.”

“Let’s go, then. We can stop by your house and visit Kathy’s aunt on the way.”

We reached my place, and I changed quickly while Nirmala chatted with the cook. She had asked him to prepare some breakfast, which we had before heading to Kathy’s aunt’s home.

Her aunt was resting, and the boys I’d met earlier—Abhijith and Pankaj—were helping her.

“Kathy should be here any moment,” Abhijith told us.

“We’re heading to the muhurat shoot,” I said.
“You should come, if there’s someone to care for your aunt.”

He looked at Nirmala and raised a brow.

“Meet my girlfriend, Nirmala.”
“Nirmala, this is Abhijith—Kathy’s neighbor.”

“Nice to meet you,” she said. **“What do you do?”**

“I work with a shipping line. Currently on a two-month break.”

Film City – Muhurat Function

By noon, we reached Film City. Dad had sent us their exact location.

The place was buzzing with media, fans, and film industry insiders.

Mohsin Khan was making his debut as a lead, and Monica

was back in the director's chair. Rumors were swirling about a powerful new villain being cast.

Monica, Mohsin, and Kumar sat at a press table fielding questions.

"We've heard a new villain is joining the movie. Can you confirm?" a reporter asked.

Kumar looked to Monica, who nodded toward Mohsin to answer.

"His name is Ananth," Mohsin said. **"He's my childhood friend. We studied together. This is his first role, but I think he's perfect for it."**

"Why this sudden shift—casting yourself as the hero and a new actor as the villain?"

"The script. Monica's story demanded it. You'll see when the movie is out."

Suddenly, a production assistant whispered something to Mohsin.

He stood up. **"It's time for the muhurat ceremony."**

Kumar stepped forward and lit a diya before a statue of Surya Bhagavan. He cracked a coconut to begin the puja. A priest chanted mantras while other dignitaries followed suit.

I was invited to perform the ritual, but I asked Nirmala to do it on my behalf.

Afterward, the symbolic first shot of the film was taken.

Lunch & Introductions

Guests were then invited to the lunch area. Monica spotted us and came over.

“Hi Atul, I’ve heard a lot about you from your dad,” she said with a warm smile. Then, noticing Nirmala, she asked, **“And who’s this lovely lady?”**

“My girlfriend—Nirmala. Nirmala, meet Monica Khan—director of this film and Mohsin’s wife.”

“I’ve heard of you. Lovely to meet you,” Nirmala said.

“Would you come with me for a moment? I’d like a word.”

Nirmala glanced at me. I nodded in approval, and she followed Monica to her vanity van.

Nirmala

Scene: Inside the Vanity Van – Nirmala Confronts Ananth

I followed Monica to a vanity van parked behind the set. She knocked on the door, and a man who looked like a makeup artist opened it.

“Come in, madam. Sir is waiting for you.”

I stepped in behind her. The door shut behind us.

Inside, Ananth sat in a high-backed makeup chair, having some final touches done. For a second, I froze. *What is he doing here?*

Then it clicked—Mohsin had mentioned a new villain joining the film. Of course. It was Ananth.

He looked at me and winked. Uncomfortable, I shifted behind Monica.

“Who is this man?” I asked quietly.

“The film’s villain,” she replied. “He has a proposal—he wants you to act in the film.”

“Why me?”

“He saw you from the van. Said you’re perfect for the role opposite him.”

She turned toward the door.
“You two talk. I’ll be back in five minutes.”

With that, Monica and the makeup artist exited the van, shutting the door behind them.

A Closed Conversation

I turned to Ananth. **“What are you doing here?”**

“Mohsin invited me. Said he needed a villain who could match his stature.”

“You certainly fit the part. But will you agree to lose to him in the movie?”

He smirked. **“Who said anything about losing? I never lose—on-screen or off.”**

I decided to shift the conversation. **“Why do you want me in the film?”**

“So we can meet regularly. You’ll report to me what they’re up to.”

“You want information... but did you ever consider that they might want to know about you too?”

“And what exactly do they want?”

“From what I’ve gathered, just stability. Atul told me they’re focused on ensuring peace—so their businesses thrive.”

“So all they care about is money?”

"I wouldn't reduce it to that. But yes, economic stability benefits them. Whereas you... you want chaos. That's when guns, deals, and tech make profit. Right?"

He didn't deny it.

The Proposal

"So, what's your plan?" I asked. "Shoot your scenes quietly and vanish before Kumar catches on?"

"Exactly. Mohsin and I agreed to shoot separately. Kumar won't be involved until post-production—by then, I'll be gone."

"And what about the secret you promised me? About my parents?"

"After the shoot wraps up, I'll tell you everything. I swear. But I need more from you first."

"So I should just trust you blindly?"

"It's a fair exchange. You're gaining too—visibility, career, money. And maybe a future."

"You mean, a future with Atul? I'm already trying to seduce him, get into their house. They're one of the wealthiest families in India."

"Don't place too much hope there. You never know how things turn."

"That's why I'll have a prenuptial agreement. If things fall apart, I walk away rich."

He chuckled. **"You're shrewder than I gave you credit for. Fine. Play your game, just don't reveal me. Tell Atul Monica asked you to keep the role confidential."**

"They're trusting, not the suspicious type. They won't doubt me."

"And you're okay exploiting that trust?"

"I'm giving something, getting something. Do you think they built their empire legally?"

"Actually, I do. I looked into them. Kumar inherited some old money, but grew it using skill and loyal partnerships. There's no record of shady dealings."

"How do you know all this?"

"Because I've been watching them. Ever since Kumar started snooping around me, I started watching back. Still, I can't trace how he gets those Swiss deposits. Or how he has such free access to government corridors. The drones used during the war? That had his signature."

"I've only heard stories. You're saying he provided those drones?"

"That's what it looks like. Not imported. Made here. Caught everyone by surprise—especially the enemy. They never expected India to hit back with that kind of tech."

"You sound like you were there."

"I wasn't. But I've got first-hand intel."

Closing the Deal

"So, should I keep targeting Atul and his family?"

He shrugged. "Do what you must. I just want the inside scoop. How you get it is your problem."

"Alright. Let me know my shooting schedule."

“I’ll tell Monica to share the call sheets. Discuss payment with her. After all, it’s Kumar’s money—you might as well get a good deal.”

I stood and headed to the door.

“One last thing,” he added. “Be careful. You’re walking a tightrope.”

“I always am.”

I stepped out into the sunlight, closing the door behind me. I let out a long breath.

He hadn’t seen through my lie.

And although I got only fragments of information, one thing was clear—Ananth was not just a villain on-screen. He was aligned with India’s real enemies.

Atul

I saw Nirmala approaching. She dropped into the chair beside me and asked, “Why were you so late?”

“Monica offered me a role in the movie. I’m going to be the villain’s sidekick. I hope the role is substantial.”

“Did you agree to the movie?”

“I did. The other details have to be worked out with Monica. I might need to sign the contract soon.”

“Did you meet the villain?”

She glanced around cautiously, as if someone might be listening. “I’ll give you the details later,” she whispered.

“Let’s grab lunch, then head to the office.”

After lunch, we met Monica.

“Kumar had to leave due to a work emergency,” she said. “Nirmala, if you’ve agreed to the film, come tomorrow to sign the contract. I’ll send you the details and your shooting schedule in advance.”

Nirmala nodded. We said our goodbyes and walked to the car.

“Did you see Abhijith?”

“No, but don’t worry—he should be around.”

“It’s not just that. I need to speak with him. I’ll call.”

I contacted Abhijith through my mind-controlled communication device. He answered after three rings.

“I’m making rounds of the film city,” he said.

“Can you meet me at the parking area? We’re about to leave for the office.”

“I’ll be there in two minutes.”

He showed up within five. “Come with us to the office. I need to talk to you,” I said.

“Sure, sir.”

Nirmala sat in the front passenger seat while Abhijith took the back. I drove us to the office.

At the entrance, Sravanthi appeared with a stack of files.

“Sir, I need your signature on these.”

“I’ll get to them in a minute. Please show Nirmala to one of the guest rooms so she can rest. Also, this is Abhijith—he’ll be joining our team.”

Sravanthi nodded and led Nirmala away.

Turning to Abhijith, I explained, “Your job is to shadow Nirmala when she goes for shoots. You’ll act as her manager and bodyguard. She was recently kidnapped and hasn’t shared many details—maybe out of fear. You’ll ensure her safety during her outings. From the moment she leaves home until she returns, you’re her shadow. Once she’s home, our team takes over her security.”

“I understand, sir.”

I quickly jotted down his designation and salary and handed it to Sravanthi so she could prepare his official appointment letter.

Later, she returned with the document. I signed and gave it to Abhijith. “Sravanthi, please show him his cabin, issue a communication device, and explain our procedures.”

They left. When Sravanthi came back, we resumed working on the files.

Around 4:45 PM, Nirmala returned to my cabin. She looked refreshed.

“Shall I drop you home?” I asked.

“Can we go somewhere instead?”

“Anywhere in mind?”

“Somewhere outside the city.”

“Let’s go to the Gorai Beach guest house. I’ll have the security team activate the transporter.”

Once I got the confirmation, we used the transporter to reach the guest house, then disabled it for security reasons.

We grabbed a couple of beers and sat on the upstairs veranda, gazing at the dark sea. After an hour, Nirmala asked, "Shall we go in for dinner?"

"Yes. Is it ready?"

"The cook already informed us. Didn't you hear?"

"No, I was lost in thought."

Dinner was served. Nirmala filled our plates. We ate mostly in silence.

Afterward, I washed my hands and settled in the hall, switching on the TV. Ten minutes later, a news segment aired about our movie.

"Famous industrialist Mr. Kumar is producing 'Kaliyug Mahabharat,' directed by Monica and starring her husband Mohsin Khan in the lead role for the first time. Known for playing villains, Mohsin now plays the hero. A newcomer, Ananth, will debut as the villain. Nirmala Vaidikaran is cast as his sidekick. The female lead is yet to be finalized. Ananth was not present at the muhurat ceremony," the anchor reported.

Nirmala came and sat beside me. "So, what's the news?"

"They're announcing the movie... and your involvement."

Footage of Nirmala played on screen.

The anchor continued, *"Nirmala is reportedly the girlfriend of Atul, son of producer Kumar."*

“Thanks to you, I’m in the news too,” she smiled.

“No, it’s thanks to you that I got this break.”

She chuckled. “You give me too much credit.”

The segment ended, and I switched to a movie channel. We watched it for a while, but I grew restless and stepped into the bathroom. When I returned, Nirmala had turned off the TV and was ready for bed.

She looked radiant, a sparkle in her eyes and mischief on her lips.

I stared into her eyes, getting lost in their depths. They say the eyes are windows to the soul—or to the heart, as Dad would put it. Looking into hers, I couldn’t tell what they reflected, only that I was drawn to them.

Then she kissed me, and suddenly we were in another world.

When I opened my eyes, I was lying on the bed, Nirmala beside me, her hand resting on my chest. I tried to recall how we got here. I remembered her kiss—but everything after that was a blur.

Pushing the thoughts aside, I drifted back to sleep.

Nirmala walked over and sat beside me. “So, what’s the news?” she asked.

“They just announced our movie—and you were featured as well.”

The screen flashed a clip of her. The announcer added, *“Nirmala is the girlfriend of Mr. Kumar’s son, Atul.”*

She turned to me and smiled, “Because of you, I’m also in the news.”

“No,” I said, smiling back, “it’s because of *you* that I even have a shot at becoming an actor.”

“It’s not because of me,” she replied, shaking her head gently. “You’re just saying that.”

“I’m not. You’re a natural beauty, and they saw that.”

The news segment ended. I switched to another channel playing a movie. We watched in silence for a while. Eventually, boredom crept in, and I got up to use the bathroom. When I came back, Nirmala had turned off the TV and was ready to head to the bedroom.

We moved into the cool, dimly lit room. The air conditioner hummed softly in the background. Nirmala stood before me, her eyes sparkling with mischief, a playful smile tugging at her lips.

I looked into her eyes—deep, expressive, magnetic. I once read that eyes are windows to the soul, but Dad used to say they were windows to the heart. Whatever they were, Nirmala’s eyes held me captive.

I wasn’t sure how long I stood there, caught in her gaze, until she kissed me.

There was heat in her kiss—an urgency, a longing—and something else I couldn’t quite place. Was it fire? Or was it fear masked in desire?

We lost ourselves in that moment. And when I opened my eyes again, I was lying on the bed, Nirmala asleep beside me, her hand resting gently on my chest.

I tried to recall what had happened. I remembered the kiss, the intensity—but everything else was a blur. How had we

gotten from that kiss to now? Had I blacked out, or simply lost track of time?

The questions circled in my head, but fatigue pulled me under once more.

I pushed the thoughts aside and closed my eyes, slipping quietly back into sleep.

I woke up with a start, a strange sense of disorientation clouding my mind. I tried to recall what had happened the previous night, but the memories eluded me. It was unsettling. *Did someone drug me?*

That seemed unlikely. The guesthouse staff were handpicked by Kumar himself—people he trusted implicitly. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off.

Could Nirmala have done something? I glanced at her. She was lying next to me, sleeping peacefully, her face calm and innocent. I couldn't believe she'd do anything to harm me.

I slipped out of bed quietly. She stirred slightly, but didn't wake. I looked around for her handbag. It wasn't in the bedroom. Eventually, I found it in the dining room. She must have left it there after dinner.

I hesitated for a second, then opened it and looked inside. No pills, no syringes—nothing suspicious. Everything seemed normal.

I placed the bag back exactly how I found it, then made my way to the kitchen. I prepared a cup of coffee and sat at the dining table, trying to piece things together. Something still didn't sit right. There was a gap in my memory, and I didn't like it.

After finishing the coffee, I stepped outside and asked the watchman about the cook.

“She left after preparing dinner,” he said. “She only comes in the afternoon to make lunch, if needed.”

I nodded silently and returned to the bedroom. I picked up a towel and headed for a shower.

Refreshed, I pulled out a clean outfit from the cupboard, laid it on the bed, and began getting dressed.

Nirmala stirred in her sleep and half-opened her eyes. “Where are you going?” she asked sleepily.

“Where else? To the office. I’ve got some work. If you want to stay here, feel free. I’ll be back after I wrap things up.”

“Okay,” she mumbled. “I’ll sleep a little longer. If Monica calls, I’ll let you know.”

“Perfect. See you later.”

I finished dressing, walked over to the transporter, activated it, and was back at the office in moments. I ordered breakfast and sat down at my desk, checking emails and notifications.

Chapter 6

Kumar

I was sitting in my cabin, reviewing the finance reports. The future outlook appeared promising. With our drone supply to the military, we were in the government's good books. We received substantial payments, which not only boosted our revenues but also enhanced the government's goodwill among the public and global leaders.

In one strategic move, our military had stopped the onset of a potential third world war. Our enemies had no choice but to retreat with their tails between their legs. I doubt they'll attempt anything reckless again—at least for a while.

China lost face in the international community. Many U.S. companies operating in China are now relocating to India. This development is yet another blow to China, following the outbreak of COVID-19. Although there are sporadic reports of new infections emerging from China, India has seen very few cases thanks to the government's free vaccination drives. Our company played a crucial role by supplying a large number of high-quality vaccines, superior to those distributed in the U.S. and other countries.

What was once a red zone for us post-COVID has now turned green. With Atul managing company operations, I decided to shift my focus to finding Asur. I'm sure he's watching us from somewhere. We know very little about him, but it seems he knows far more about us than we're comfortable with.

Ananth, the villain from Monica's film, has yet to make an appearance. He's apparently hiding while they film his backstory abroad, keeping the press and outsiders away from the shooting location. Monica provides occasional updates, but they're rare and inconsistent. I understand her

priority is completing her project, but my main concern is uncovering more about Ananth—which, so far, remains elusive.

Nirmala's shooting schedule hadn't been finalized yet. Once she begins filming, we might learn more.

Suddenly, the intercom rang. It was the operator.

"Sir, a call from the PMO's office."

"Put them through."

"Hello sir, the PM would like to speak with you. Please hold."

"Good morning, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Good morning. We've received indications that China is mobilizing forces near the LAC again. Their intentions are unclear. Why are they acting so confidently? Could they be developing a new weapon?"

"I don't think they possess any new weapons. If they had, they wouldn't hesitate to use them or at least issue threats. It must be something else. I'll make some inquiries and monitor for clues. I'll inform you if we discover anything."

"Alright. I'll await your update."

"I'll call you immediately if I sense anything sinister."
The call ended.

After their defeat in the last war, how could China dare to resume its provocations? Are they getting external support? If so, from whom? Is Asur involved? Who is he really?

I don't have answers yet, but I sense something dreadful looming on the horizon—something that could shatter the current world order. We may be forced to either go to war or surrender.

Later, I went to the office in Juhu and sat at my desk. Sravanthi, the new recruit, entered my cabin.

"I have some files for you to sign," she said.

"I told you to pass all files to Atul."

"These require your signature. Lawyer Swaminathan asked for it specifically."

"Alright, bring them here."

It took me about an hour to go through and sign the documents she brought. Once done, she collected them but remained seated, seemingly wanting to share something.

"What's the news?" I asked.

"It seems Atul sir is spending all his time with Nirmala madam."

"As Atul was feeling depressed, I asked Nirmala to keep an eye on him."

"But why would he be depressed? He has everything one could ask for."

"He's missing his wife and daughter."

"He's married? And has a daughter?"

"Yes, but from a previous life. You needn't worry about it. I just wanted to say that he's been with Nirmala constantly."

Was that a hint of jealousy in her voice? Did she have feelings for Atul? All I knew was that she came from our Hyderabad branch to replace Kathy. Curious, I used my mind-controlled device to contact our Chennai branch—she's originally from there—and asked for her background information.

"Nirmala will be busy soon. Her shooting schedule is confirmed. Right now, they're filming abroad, but they'll resume here shortly."

Sravanthi looked relieved—perhaps she hoped Atul would stay. But then her expression changed. Maybe she feared

he'd follow Nirmala abroad. I decided not to interfere. Atul has a mission; he can handle it however he chooses.

"You keep tabs on Atul's whereabouts and report to me," I instructed.

She seemed reassured by that.

After she left, I received Sravanthi's full background report. She turned out to be the daughter of my aunt's son, who moved to Madras. By our familial conventions, Sravanthi would be Atul's sister-in-law. Perhaps her family assumed he was unmarried and wealthy and saw an opportunity. Clearly, they didn't know much about Atul's past or our family history.

Just as I was about to leave, Kavitha entered the office. I was surprised—she was supposed to be in New York. "Hi Kavitha! When did you arrive?"

"Kumar, madam called me. She wasn't feeling well."

"What happened to Loveleen?"

"Nothing serious—just morning sickness. She asked you to come home for lunch."

"She's pregnant? She didn't tell me!"

"She just returned from the doctor and immediately called me to fly in from New York. She hasn't even told her parents yet. She wanted to inform you herself."

"Well, now the surprise is spoiled. But I'll pretend I don't know. Let's go. How's everyone in New York?"

"They're doing well. Rashmi visited recently to buy medical equipment. She stayed with us and was thrilled to meet her father."

"I arranged that. They were worried about Reyansh, with no updates."

"But how does he look like you—just older?"

“He’s from the original timeline. We came from the past. He was different. Nandini helped him recover and send messages to me. Later, she left the hospital for his daughters to manage.”

“She gave them the hospital?”
“Nandini saw them as her own. He looked like her husband—just older—and helped her connect with her real husband. She felt indebted.”

“I don’t understand any of this, but don’t let Madam know I’m clueless.”

“So why didn’t you marry?” I asked.

“I had a few proposals, but I was once married to someone who looked like you. I ran away from home and failed him. Now, I have shelter and food, and that’s enough for me. I’ve learned my lesson.”

“Let the past be. Think about your future. Find a companion.”

“I’ll consider it.”

We reached home, and Loveleen came out of her room.

“Why did you call Kavitha from New York? Won’t they be inconvenienced?”

“I have good news—we’re pregnant!”

“What? That’s wonderful! We must celebrate. I’ll throw a party!”

She pulled me into her room, where I kissed her and thanked her. Then we headed to the dining room for lunch.

It was Saturday evening, and we had organized a party in our backyard to celebrate Loveleen’s pregnancy. Her family

had flown in from Delhi, and several others had joined us from New York.

Central ministers also attended the event, promising that the Prime Minister would join later. Loveleen's father, who had recently joined the ruling party at the Centre, had extended invitations to these politicians. He aimed to accomplish two things: first, to showcase his growing political influence, and second, to highlight his connection to a wealthy and well-connected son-in-law. He was busy entertaining guests, assisted by Loveleen.

Atul arrived with Nirmala and Sravanthi. Kathy also came from Chennai and announced that her wedding was scheduled for next month. She added that her aunt was feeling better, thanks to help from the neighbours.

Later, her aunt's neighbours arrived with a bouquet and handed it to Loveleen. Kathy introduced them and explained how they had been incredibly supportive during her aunt's accident. After a brief greeting, they mingled with the other guests.

I called Sravanthi over and asked her to find out more about the boys who had accompanied Kathy.

She returned shortly and said, "They were invited by Atul, not Kathy. He met them when he visited her aunt."

"If Atul invited them, that's fine. But we need to be cautious about who attends, especially with the Prime Minister expected."

"Are you sure he's coming?" she asked.

"Didn't you notice PMO security scanning the guests? He'll be here shortly. Let's stay alert."

Guests came over to congratulate us. This was only our second public appearance since the movie's muhurat shot. Looking around, I noticed people from all walks of life:

politicians, business tycoons, workers from our various businesses. Our conglomerate now spans multiple sectors. Top management personnel were teleported in, while others had arranged celebrations at their respective locations. Most of our Mumbai-based staff were present.

This was an important day in our lives—our first baby to be born after the merger of timelines, and born on the original timeline.

I looked for Loveleen. She was engaging with lady politicians and the spouses of ministers. She seemed natural in this space. Her ambition now appeared focused on supporting her father's rise to the Chief Minister's seat.

With our financial clout and his political ambition, this goal didn't seem too far-fetched. Rajveer Khanna was hosting his political peers near the bar. That area, unsurprisingly, was a hit—90% of the men were gathered there, enjoying drinks in the dedicated seating area. Even some women were keen to join in. It seems that high-society women are evolving, adopting new habits like drinking and smoking. Their children, following closely, were also partaking—waiters serving them drinks and appetizers.

Atul's friends were socializing well with others their age. Young men were trying to impress young women, though the women appeared cautious, clearly assessing worth before engaging.

Society had changed dramatically during our years of temporal absence. Fashion trends, too, had shifted. Women, both young and old, seemed more comfortable with revealing styles—perhaps a product of evolving social norms or modern party culture.

I wondered again about Bob's intentions. Was his agenda truly to find Asur and his followers, or did he have something else in mind? Why create and then merge

timelines? Was the goal simply to grant me wealth? If so, he could have handed me money directly and instructed me to locate Asur. The only tangible benefit from the merger seemed to be our regained youth.

When I boarded the spaceship, another version of me—another Kumar—was sent to Mars. He developed the technology and piloted the mission, accompanied by his wife Loveleen and their son, Dhruv. Another Kumar from the original timeline now manages our affairs in New York. How many Kumars resulted from this timeline merger? If there are several, can we even call it a “merger”?

I was sent from 1983 to 2017, and then Loveleen joined me to study and marry me. Yet I retain the memories of all Kumars from all timelines. Was this part of Bob’s plan?

Among those memories are joyful moments and painful ones—Sneha’s tragic death in a fire, but also sweet memories with Sahithi and Sunitha, the births of many children, and the kidnapping and eventual return of Leena after six long years.

“Sir, the PM will arrive in five minutes.”

Snapped out of my thoughts, I looked up. It was a security officer.

“Please come with me, sir. Can I see your office room?”

I led him to my office in the house. After scanning the room for bugs, he said, “Please wait here. The PM will be with you shortly.”

I sat and waited. Ten minutes later, he entered.

“Apologies for the delay,” he said. “Guests surrounded me, wanting to know the purpose of my visit.”

“Please, have a seat. What can I do for you?”

“The Chinese are once again mobilizing troops near the LAC. Their intentions are unclear.”

“There’s definitely something happening behind the scenes. I don’t know what it is yet, but I sense something dangerous on the horizon.”

“What’s the status on Mars?”

“Our team landed safely and has begun constructing a settlement.”

“And the search for Asur?”

“We’re following leads, but I suspect we’re being misled. Initially, we thought Mohsin Khan might know something. He brought in Ananth to play a villain in their film. Ananth appears to be acting as if he’s Asur, but I’m convinced it’s just a diversion—he’s not the real one.”

“There’s another concern,” the PM said gravely. “Someone is blackmailing us. One of our ministers had a daughter out of wedlock. Now she’s been kidnapped. The blackmailer wants us to announce early elections—likely a move to destabilize the government.”

“What’s their interest in early elections?”

“They likely have a strategy to win. But if the scandal breaks now, it would ruin us. That girl—she’s also the daughter of another minister. If this becomes public, the government will collapse.”

I resisted the urge to ask names. “Give me the girl’s details. We’ll find her and ensure her safety. But how do we know they won’t leak the story anyway?”

“We’ll preempt it. Once she’s safe, the minister will publicly acknowledge her. They’ll concoct a narrative to justify keeping it a secret.”

I called our island bunker and asked them to investigate. I already had some suspicions.

"We're on it, sir. We'll update you as soon as we know anything," my operative said.

The PM handed me a card. "This is my personal number. Call any time—someone will respond."

I memorized it and put it in my drawer. "Anything else, sir?"

"One more thing," he said. "There are reports of financial mismanagement in the defence forces. I want you to conduct an independent audit and find the weak links."

"I don't have the internal resources for that kind of task."

"Hire who you need. Use trustworthy people. We'll support you fully."

"I have someone in mind—trustworthy and capable. He's currently managing our affairs in New York. I'll bring him here under the guise of developing software for the armed forces. That role will give him access to uncover the flaws."

"Very well. I'll instruct the Defence Ministry to draft the necessary contracts."

He stood up and shook my hand. I walked him to the door. He rejoined the party, met with a few political allies, had a drink, and left.

Rajveer Khanna came over, asking about the PM's visit. I told him it was a national security matter I couldn't discuss in public. He took the hint and walked away.

Why did the PM choose to come here, publicly, instead of calling me to his office? Perhaps he wanted to make a point to his rivals—letting them know who he trusts.

I called Atul and briefed him on the situation. He went to check in with our team and then returned to Nirmala's side.

I couldn't help wondering—was he getting too close to her? Then again, with her shooting schedule resuming soon, they would fly out to Russia. I'd given them an unlimited budget to make the film groundbreaking.

From the corner of my eye, I noticed them sharing a public display of affection. These days, the younger generation seemed uninhibited. Looking around, I saw other young couples doing the same.

I spotted Abhijith chatting animatedly with a girl, holding her hand. She pulled away and walked over to her group of friends.

One of them looked familiar—was she the kidnapped girl the PM had mentioned?

I called over a security guard and instructed him to bring her to my office. I watched as he approached her and led her in.

"Please, come in and take a seat," I said.

She sat down. I stared at her. She held my gaze for a moment before looking away.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, sir. You're Mr. Kumar—an industrialist and much more."

"Do you know why the Prime Minister visited me today?"

"No, sir."

"He's concerned about you and others. We're providing security, but please avoid going out with strangers. I'm not restricting your routine, just asking you to be careful."

She nodded.

"You may go. Tell your friends to stay alert as well."

She left. I sat there in thought for a few minutes.

Then I called Atul and asked him to bring Rajveer uncle to my office.

By the time they arrived, I had already formed a plan of action. I began to explain it to them.

We activated our entire intelligence network to uncover what exactly the Prime Minister had in mind. Every minister's background was thoroughly researched, and their personal and professional histories were examined with a fine-tooth comb. Despite our efforts, we found nothing of significance—no leads, no red flags.

A few days later, in our next board meeting, our enemies' intentions began to surface.

Prathap's daughter, Tania, had taken over the management of their company after Prathap suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. For years, Prathap had held significant influence in board meetings, wielding the voting power of his investors with stability and discretion. Until now, we'd never faced any resistance from him or his appointed representatives.

However, during the meeting, Tania took a markedly different stance. She began challenging several of our past decisions—decisions that Prathap himself had either approved or been fully aware of. I advised her to consult her father before raising such objections.

Though I managed to silence her—for now—I sensed that her inquiries weren't over. Her tone wasn't one of curiosity; it was confrontational. She was here with an agenda.

Concerned about Prathap's condition, I called Pranitha to get an update. What she told me was deeply troubling, so I immediately flew to Vizag to visit him in the hospital.

When I saw Prathap, I was shaken. The entire left side of his body was paralyzed, and he struggled to speak coherently. It was painful to witness him in such a state. After a brief visit, I asked to speak with his doctor.

What the doctor revealed shocked me.

He explained that Prathap had been under his regular care for some time. By all accounts, he had been in excellent health—disciplined with his exercise, strict with his diet, and regularly monitored. A stroke of such severity was highly unlikely. The doctor had already performed extensive testing and shared his conclusion with me: Prathap had likely been poisoned.

According to him, the stroke was not natural. A rare combination of herbal toxins had been used to induce the symptoms, ultimately resulting in paralysis. This wasn't just a medical emergency—it was an orchestrated attack.

I left the hospital with a heavy heart but also a renewed sense of resolve. I was relieved I had already arranged for certain family members to relocate to New York, away from the public eye. The transporter in New York had been cleverly disguised as a scrap warehouse in Hyderabad. Anyone using the transporter would find themselves standing amid junk—just as intended. No one would suspect what lay behind the illusion.

As for Prathap, I instructed the doctor to spare no expense in his treatment. If herbal medicine offered any hope, I had someone in mind—Nirmala's grandfather, a seasoned practitioner of traditional healing. I offered to bring him in if the doctor thought it might help.

As I walked out of the hospital, my thoughts were clouded with unease. What trouble would Tania stir up next?

When Tania's disruptive behavior reached its peak, I decided to shift tactics. Under the guise of giving her a tour of our manufacturing unit, I took her to the factory and introduced her to our most advanced products. Among them was the mind-controlled device—a revolutionary piece of technology I believed would change her perspective.

I handed her a pair of earbuds and asked her to insert them. She assumed they were standard mobile phone accessories and complied without hesitation. The moment she configured them, the surprise on her face was evident. To demonstrate the device's capability, I asked her to call her mother—using only her mind. She did so successfully, astonished at the seamlessness of the interaction.

When she tried to remove the earbuds, she discovered they were impossible to take out. These latest models are designed to blend with the inner ear and lack any external part to grip or pull. I told her they couldn't be removed manually and encouraged her to keep them in and continue testing them. She agreed, intrigued.

After the factory visit, I invited her to our home for lunch. I served her a variety of non-vegetarian dishes, while I abstained, citing a **vrāt** (a religious fast). She ate heartily, but soon began to feel drowsy. I told her she must be tired from all the recent stress and suggested she take a short rest. I showed her to a guest room, and she soon fell asleep.

In reality, I had laced her food with a mild sedative. Once she was in deep sleep, I connected the mind-reading device to her mind-controlled earbuds and began extracting her

recent memories for analysis, using our AI systems for support.

What I uncovered was not entirely unexpected—but disturbing nonetheless.

Tania had been blackmailed. Someone had threatened to kidnap her two-year-old son unless she followed their instructions. They had orchestrated Prathap's stroke using a rare herbal poison to incapacitate him, leaving her to take control of the company. Their objective was clear: destabilize our operations from within.

After reviewing all the data, I used the mind reader again—this time to erase the traumatic memories of her being blackmailed and the hostile behavior that followed. I carefully restored her emotional balance without tampering with unrelated memories.

When she awoke in the evening, she was visibly confused to find herself still in our house. I told her she had felt tired after lunch and had chosen to rest. She accepted the explanation and mentioned that she felt unusually light-headed, even refreshed. She thanked me for my hospitality.

I arranged for her safe return home and then turned my attention to Prathap. I had him airlifted to Nirmala's grandfather's clinic, a place known for treating complex cases using traditional medicine. I shared with him the specific herbs and substances used to induce Prathap's condition. After reviewing the details, he agreed to begin treatment immediately.

Chapter 7

Kumar

he first signs of the next crisis came when we intercepted a report sent to ISRO. It stated that the Mars station had spotted an alien spaceship approaching the planet. A second report followed soon after, confirming that the spaceship had bypassed Mars and was now heading toward Earth.

In response, our government promptly informed allied nations of the sighting. Our island bunker picked up an immediate flurry of activity from major global space agencies, particularly NASA and the Russian agency ROSCOSMOS. Emergency meetings were being held across multiple nations, all trying to make sense of the situation and formulate a coordinated response.

Realizing the gravity of the threat, I saw no option but to summon our family members stationed in New York back to India. It was time to put everyone to work.

As advised by the Prime Minister, I assigned Reyansh to audit the defence software systems. To enable this, I secured a software development contract from the Defence Ministry, specifically for the Navy. I instructed Sravanthi to send the contract documents to Reyansh for implementation. Abhijith was assigned to assist him on the naval project.

I estimate the alien spaceship will take another five months to reach Earth. My goal is to resolve the issue flagged by the PM before that deadline.

Surveillance & Escalation

Since the complications involving Tania, we had also begun monitoring her sister, Pravalika. She owns a bungalow along the Vizag beachfront—one I recognized from a past incident when Manisha took Kumar to Vizag and manipulated him, but that's a story for another time.

As the alien spaceship neared Earth, it suddenly vanished from radar. This sent scientists around the globe into a frenzy. They scanned every inch of space, including the Moon, but found nothing.

I alone knew where it might be.

Bob had once taken me to the dark side of the Moon as part of our journey to Mars. I strongly suspected that the alien vessel had landed there. But the real question was—**what are their next steps?**

Soon, we started piecing together information through intercepted communications and our island bunker's intelligence network. From what we gathered, two names emerged as the likely alien leaders: **Surpanaka** and **Indrajit**. Each reportedly travels with at least ten security personnel. Even more troubling—it appeared they were receiving support from somewhere within Andhra Pradesh.

While tracking both Surpanaka and Pravalika, we came across another unexpected figure: a younger **Kumar**, who went by the name **Surya**, and was based in Vijayawada. Our investigation revealed that Surya was living with **Manisha**, the granddaughter of the same Manisha who once encountered two of the Kumars. This connection raised too many red flags to ignore.

Atul took charge of following Surya.

In a major breakthrough, we caught **Surya** and **Surpanaka** together at the tallest building in Dubai. Immediately, we redirected our satellite surveillance to focus on that location. The surveillance paid off. We captured images of

key figures—**Mama Ali**, **Kwon Cho**, and most critically, **Makrasura**—visiting the building.

This was the **first confirmed photograph** of Makrasura, aside from an earlier image where he appeared with Mohsin Khan. Now aware that we were onto him, Makrasura planted **Ananth** as a decoy. We've since been tracking Ananth under the false belief he was the real threat, allowing the true mastermind to move freely.

More disturbing was the **undisclosed link between Ananth and Nirmala**—a connection I intentionally withheld from Atul. I want him to uncover that information himself.

Atul

After completing her filming schedule, Nirmala returned home.

“Nirmala, how did the shoot go?”

“It went smoothly. Our next schedule is in fifteen days, so I’ll be here for the next two weeks.”

“Great. That means we can finally spend some quality time together.”

“First, *you* should focus on your work. From what you’ve told me, it’s critical that you attend to the tasks at hand. We’ll spend whatever time is left after that. Don’t worry, I’ll still be here to keep you company.”

Kumar

I received a call from Reyansh—he had a lead on Surpanaka’s location. He informed me that a girl was being held captive by her and that he intended to rescue her. Reyansh suspected that Surpanaka was using a unique

frequency for their transporter, different from ours, and asked if it was possible to detect and switch frequencies.

I sent him a specialized tool designed to modify transporter frequencies.

Later that day, he called back with a major breakthrough. He and his team had successfully captured **Surpanaka**, along with **Mama Ali** and **Kwon Cho**. They were currently in **New York**, unconscious. Reyansh requested immediate extraction.

I contacted my defence liaison and asked them to dispatch a team to collect the captives—Surpanaka, Mama Ali, Kwon Cho, and their respective bodyguards. I instructed that they be brought to our **Delhi office**, where I would arrange for their transfer via our transporter to New York.

Simultaneously, I called our Delhi office and directed them to configure a transporter with the new frequency I had just provided.

Roughly thirty minutes later, I received confirmation that the group of terrorists had been taken into custody, transported to Delhi, and handed over to the **Special Defence Cell**.

The next day, Reyansh called to let me know that he had returned to the Navy project.

Sudden Disruption

The following day, I received a call from **Archana**. She was concerned—the software engineers assigned to her project had gone missing, and she suspected foul play. She tried to contact Reyansh to warn him, but he wasn't answering his phone.

I immediately checked Reyansh's location using his **mind-controlled communications device**. It showed he was near the back gate of the **Navy Yard**, standing motionless on the road. That was unusual—he hadn't moved for several minutes. He might need help.

Archana said, "I'll go check on him right away."

Later, Reyansh called and explained what had happened. That morning, he couldn't get a car from the guest house, so he took an **auto-rickshaw**. Partway through the ride, the driver faked a mechanical issue, stopped the auto, and fled with Reyansh's bag. Inside it were his mobile phone and his Navy ID card. He was left stranded and unsure of what to do next. He was just about to activate his mind-controlled device when Archana arrived with security and brought him safely into the Navy Yard.

Clearly, someone is trying to **target us**—and now, they're getting bold.

Chapter 8

Kumar

It had been a month since **Reyansh and his team** successfully captured **Surpanaka and her gang**, handing them over to the **Special Branch of RAW** for interrogation and further investigation.

Then, I received an unexpected call from the **Prime Minister's Office**.

The official informed me, "The terrorists handed over to us—Surpanaka, Mama Ali, Kwon Cho, and their bodyguards—were discovered to be prison guards in disguise. The real gang is missing."

Shocked, I asked for more details. He told me that the **RAW agent in charge of the interrogation** would be sent to **Mumbai** to meet us and help investigate what had gone wrong.

Two days later, **Suyesh Acharya** from RAW arrived at our office.

I got straight to the point. "Acharya, how is it even possible that a group of high-risk terrorists could be replaced with prison guards?"

Acharya replied, "That's exactly what we can't understand. We checked the CCTV footage extensively. There's no visible indication of an escape."

"I'll have my team scrub the footage," I said. "Let's see what turns up."

"Which footage are you referring to?" he asked, puzzled.

"We receive surveillance feeds from across the globe. That's how we located the group in New York in the first place."

“You have access to footage from all over the world? What kind of feeds are you talking about?”

“We run a **data center** deep in the **Bay of Bengal**. Officially, we store data for several countries under contract. Unofficially, we intercept and store global surveillance data.”

Acharya looked stunned. “You’re far more resourceful than we were led to believe. I heard you also supplied the advanced drones that helped win the war against Pakistan and China. How did you even develop those without our knowledge?”

“We have two companies—**Future India** and **Kumar International**—where we develop cutting-edge technologies. These drones were a classified project. Only the PM was aware of it. We didn’t accept any advance. In fact, we delivered them below cost. This wasn’t about profit. Our goal is national and global security—to **eliminate threats like Surpanaka and Indrajit.**”

He leaned forward. “Wait, are you saying Surpanaka and Indrajit aren't even from Earth?”

“They’re not. They arrived aboard the alien spacecraft spotted by our **Mars colony**. We've been tracking them for over six months. When the ship neared Earth, it vanished—but we now know it landed. These operatives later allied with Mama Ali, Kwon Cho, and other global terror networks.”

“But these groups mostly operate in the West,” he said, skeptical.

“Are you certain about that?” I asked sharply. “We’ve tracked them operating in **India**, including a secluded bungalow deep in the forest. They’re planning to disrupt the global order. Do you want to know who helped spread the Coronavirus? **These terrorists did.**”

"You're making serious accusations. Do you have proof?"

"I don't speak without evidence. When they were captured, we intercepted plans for major attacks across multiple nations. The fallout would've been catastrophic."

"But now you've lost them," he said. "It seems you handed over decoys."

"We handed over the real individuals. We have their **DNA records**. We also placed **trackers**—not on them directly, as they'd detect that—but on their **security personnel**. That way, we could monitor without raising suspicion."

Acharya stared at me. "Who *are* you, really? A businessman? A spy? How do you know all this?"

"We were entrusted with this mission long ago. Our primary objective is to **track and eliminate extraterrestrial and global threats**. That's why we allowed RAW to take custody of them. If someone had tried to challenge their detention legally, we'd have intervened. But no one did. Why? Because their people knew they could retrieve them without detection."

He frowned. "So how did they manage it?"

"Come with me," I said, gesturing toward the screen. "Watch this."

I played back the surveillance footage.

"These are RAW personnel taking them out of custody," he observed.

"They *look* like RAW officers. But they're not. They're using **shape-shifting technology**, engineered from stolen DNA. They returned the next day—but brought back your **prison guards disguised as terrorists**. The switch was made right under your noses."

"Why didn't you stop them?"

“Because we want to follow them back to their source. If we intercept them too early, they’ll change their plans. We’d lose the chance to take out their **leadership**.”

“How did they get such advanced tech?”

“It was **our technology**, stolen from our warehouses. They raided our sites, killed our personnel. That’s why we’ve been operating covertly ever since.”

“So what’s the next step?”

“They’re currently hiding in **Dubai**. Our satellites are tracking them.”

“You have satellites?”

“Yes. You may recall we launched a manned spacecraft to Mars.”

“I do. I saw you board that ship... yet here you are. If you didn’t go, who did?”

“That ship is captained by another **Kumar**—the one who designed the spacecraft and led the Mars mission.”

Suddenly, my communicator buzzed. It was a message from **Atul**.

He wanted us to watch a video.

We opened it. The footage showed someone exploring an **abandoned building**, recording a 360-degree video. But something was off. In every room, a **ghostly woman** appeared in the background—always behind the videographer, never noticed directly. When the person turned around, she briefly came into view.

Acharya asked, “Is this what I think it is? A ghost following the videographer?”

"It seems so," I replied. "Our analysts discovered this video while scrubbing archived footage. It was recorded **over 20 years ago.**"

"Where was this filmed?"

"We're not sure. We suspect the location might not exist in *our* current timeline."

"What do you mean?"

"This building could have existed in an **alternate timeline.** But we can still try to locate it."

"Who will check it out?"

"I have someone in mind—**Reyansh.** I'll send a team with him."

"Can I accompany them?"

"Of course. I'll inform you when the team is ready."

"Do we know where this building might be?"

"We believe it's **somewhere in Mumbai.** First, we need to confirm if the place still exists."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"It may have been demolished. A new building could've replaced it."

"Fair point. But what about the ghost?"

"If the ghost is bound to the location, we'll find it—if it's still there."

"Keep me informed. I'll take leave for now. Let me know when it's time."

"Will do. See you soon."

I called **Reyansh** and asked him to organize a team for a ghost-hunting session at the abandoned location.

He replied, “Let me vet the people and get back to you.”

Update from Lieutenant Sainetra

Meanwhile, I received a report from **Lieutenant Sainetra’s team**. They had handed over the **bungalow** to the caretaker and returned to base. No unusual activity had been observed while they were stationed there.

I hadn’t informed **Mr. Acharya** about our personnel who were abandoned at sea—but I needed answers. Hopefully, **Reyansh** would uncover something during his **defence software audit**. I decided it was time to instruct him to be more **aggressive** with the investigation.

Trip Planning and Family Research

Reyansh confirmed he had organized a team to investigate the **abandoned hospital**. He had already dispatched someone to verify the location and plan the logistics of their stay.

I informed **Mr. Acharya** about the planned visit and advised him to coordinate directly with Reyansh.

With that settled, I turned my attention to **Nirmala**. I’d ordered a background check on her and her family. Initial reports stated that her parents died years ago in a car accident. She has a younger brother, **Monkish**, who studies at a boarding school and stays with extended family in Delhi during holidays—almost like he was adopted by them. Nirmala is deeply attached to him but rarely sees him due to his schooling.

Two days later, I received the full report on their **family history**.

While no “skeletons” had tumbled out, some **very intriguing details** emerged. I asked **Monica** to send me the original manuscript of the film *Kaliyuga Maha Bharath*. In it, a character named **Acharya** helped **Bhavani’s daughter-in-law** conceive. From our investigation, it became clear that **Nirmala is a direct descendant**—the **great-great-great-granddaughter**—of Acharya.

Their family had a **long lineage of doctors**, closely tied to Bhavani’s lineage. Interestingly, Nirmala’s grandfather had distanced himself from the main family. Also worth noting—Nirmala was **in the car during her parents’ fatal accident** at the age of 18. She was in the back seat and miraculously survived unharmed while both parents died on the spot.

Breakthrough in Mind-Controlled Tech

Just then, my phone rang. It was **Sunitha**, sounding excited.

“We’ve made a breakthrough with the mind-controlled device,” she said. “Atul had an idea—we can now **stream videos directly into the mind** of the user. It will feel as though they’re watching the movie in their head.”

“Are you using our AI system to transmit the content?”

“Yes, we are.”

“In that case, try this enhancement: allow the viewer to **select a character from the video** and experience the movie as that character. They can’t alter the plot, but they should feel as though they’re **living the role**. If this works, we’ll launch the feature with *Kaliyuga Maha Bharath*. It could be a game-changer—not just for the film, but for selling these mind-communicators as entertainment devices.”

“I’ll look into it.” She ended the call.

I picked up Nirmala’s report again and scanned it for more insights.

Thought-to-Video Transmission

Later, Sunitha called again.

“Reyansh wants to know if it’s possible to **transmit thoughts as video.**”

“Absolutely. If we can send movies into someone’s mind, we can certainly send their **mental visuals** out.”

She continued, “He’s on a mission and likely wants to share **what he sees** with our team in real time.”

“That’s brilliant. Let’s begin development. Have him connected to the receiver and monitored by our best people.”

Nirmala’s Truth & Atul’s Doubt

I debated whether to tell **Atul** about Nirmala’s lineage and past. After some thought, I decided **he needed to know.**

I called him in and handed over Nirmala’s full report.

After reading it, Atul asked, “Where did this come from?”

“I had her investigated. I grew suspicious about her history.”

“What triggered your suspicion?”

“Our team analyzed video logs from the **stored surveillance data** post her kidnapping. They tracked her being taken to an **abandoned building**, where she was held for four days. When she finally left, she was **driving the vehicle herself.** This suggests she made some form of **deal with her captors.**

Soon after, we tracked **Ananth** leaving the same building. It's likely he was involved in her abduction. His request for her to act in his movie may be a way to **keep her close and under control.**"

Atul nodded grimly. "I had my doubts too. I noticed her using a **mind-controlled device** that didn't look like ours."

"Can you connect her device to our **mind-reading interface?**"

"Yes. But we'll need her to be vulnerable—perhaps at a party. Get her **drunk**, and we'll attempt to access her memories."

Reyansh's Doubts About Acharya

Atul added, "By the way, Reyansh sent a message. He's suspicious of **Acharya from RAW**. He believes Acharya is deliberately **delaying the capture of terrorists.**"

"What's Acharya doing exactly?"

"Reyansh says he's acting **defensively**, not offensively—more interested in holding on to suspects than acting proactively."

I considered this. "It's possible Acharya is worried about losing them again, like last time. But Reyansh is sharp. He rarely makes baseless accusations. If he suspects something, **there must be a reason.**"

"I agree. I'll go and check it out myself. **Phani** is prepping the transporter."

"Good. Go there and report back. Let's stay ahead of whatever is coming."

Atul nodded, got up, and left for the transporter.

Atul

On **Kumar's suggestion**, I visited the site where **Asur's gang** had last been tracked. But what were they doing there?

I stepped out of the **transporter**, where **Reyansh** welcomed me and introduced the team:

- **Sailor Manoj**
- **Sonali Raut** — strikingly beautiful
- **Vineesh, Ujjwal, Shafiq Ahmed**, and **Raavi** — all from the Navy
- **Phani, Bunty, Mike**, and **Ravali** — Ravali specializes in **communicating with spirits**
- And finally, **Acharya**, whom I had already met at our office

Reyansh updated me: **Asur's gang had left some time ago**. Acharya was coordinating with a technician to open the locked room where the **transporter** had been stored.

"I might be able to help," I said. "I've worked on configuring those doors in the past."

Reyansh guided me through the corridor. I carefully observed each door as we walked — most were unlocked and left open; the others remained secured.

Along the way, Reyansh pointed out a **statue of Devi**, fierce in appearance — a form of **Kalika Devi**. As I looked at the statue, I felt an odd energy, as if **something was hiding behind it**. It felt like the Devi was **shielding or containing** something.

At the transporter room, I used a **tool** I had brought to override the lock. I reset the parameters so that the door would now **respond only to my touch**. This would allow the

Surpanaka gang to exit if they tried, but they wouldn't be able to **re-enter** in haste.

Inside, we inspected the **power setup**. It included a **UPS system with a backup generator** for continuous power.

We traced and **disconnected the line feeding the UPS**, allowing the batteries to drain over time. This would pose a problem if the gang returned — though we weren't sure they would.

Once our work was complete, we stepped outside. Reyansh suggested returning to the **guest house**, leaving behind a **skeleton crew** to monitor the location discreetly.

"If they realize we're watching, they might not return," he said.

Return to the Guest House

We took **SUVs** back to the guest house, which Reyansh mentioned belonged to a **friend of his brother's** and had been lent to us for the mission.

On the way, **Sonali** joined me in the back seat and struck up a conversation. She was curious about my background, and the discussion soon turned to cinema — specifically the film *Kaliyuga Mahabharat*.

"That's from our production house," I told her. "**Monica Bajaj Khan** is a close friend of my father."

Her eyes lit up. "I'd love to watch a live shoot one day!"

"I'll let you know if one's happening," I promised.

The conversation drifted to other topics, and we talked late into the night, eventually **falling asleep in the veranda chairs**. In the early hours, **Reyansh** gently woke us.

"You two should get to bed," he said with a grin.

I nudged **Sonali** awake, and we both went to our rooms.

The Next Morning

It was **11 AM** when I finally woke up. After a quick shower, I grabbed a cup of coffee and joined **Reyansh**, who was working on his laptop.

I sat beside him. “How’s it going?”

He looked up, pleased. “I’ve just received access credentials to the **GeM marketplace**. Now I can start **auditing defence procurement and spending** directly.

Kumar

Loveleen and I were sitting on a bench by the beach, watching the waves roll in, while reflecting on our long pursuit of Asur. Over the course of this mission, we had come face-to-face with **Makrasura, Surpanaka, and Indrajit**. From what I had gathered through the *Kaliyuga Mahabharatam*, Surpanaka and Indrajit were ultimately **sent away—possibly to another planet**. I wasn’t sure if that planet was within our solar system or somewhere beyond.

Loveleen turned to me and asked, “What exactly is *Kaliyug* in the story?”

I explained, “*Kaliyug* is believed to have begun after Lord Krishna’s death, marking the end of *Dwaparayug*. It’s the fourth and current epoch in the cosmic cycle and is ruled by **Kali**, the demon king of this era. That’s why we see so much corruption and decline in society today—this age is his domain.”

She frowned slightly. “Do you mean to say that these evils existed in earlier yugas too?”

“They did exist,” I replied, “but not at the **scale** or **intensity** we see today. In earlier epochs, the forces of good and evil were more balanced. In *Kaliyug*, the **Rakshasas**—our version of what the West might call *demons* or *Satan*—are more active and influential.”

“Who exactly are these Rakshasas?” she asked, clearly intrigued.

“They’re believed to be **descendants of Brahma**, the creator,” I said. “If you read the *Puranas*, it becomes clear that **Rakshasas and Devas**—the gods—are actually **cousins**. There’s a cosmic rivalry between them. The Rakshasas have always tried to **usurp the heavens**, taking over what rightfully belongs to the gods. That’s why they’re constantly at war.”

I continued, “**Lord Shiva** is known as a warrior deity. With the help of his celestial warriors, he often fought to reclaim what the Rakshasas had seized. **Lord Vishnu**, on the other hand, takes a different role. He **incarnates**—takes **avatars**—to restore cosmic balance. He’s said to take **ten avatars** during one life cycle.”

“Life cycle?” she asked.

“Yes,” I nodded. “A life cycle—from one **Pralaya** to the next. A *Pralaya* is like a great flood or cosmic reset. Each life cycle has **four yugas**: *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dvapara Yuga*, and *Kali Yuga*. *Satya Yuga* is the age of truth and purity—it’s when the world is said to have emerged from water. And *Kali Yuga* ends with the world **returning to water**, symbolizing destruction and rebirth.”

Loveleen asked thoughtfully, “And what role do Rakshasas play in all of this?”

“I’m not entirely sure,” I admitted. “Maybe they were more benevolent during *Satya Yuga*, but in *Kali Yuga*, they’ve become our greatest adversaries. They’re believed to be

the **drivers of chaos**, pulling people away from righteousness. Either they lead humanity into sin—or worse—they **redefine what sin is**, blurring the lines between right and wrong.”

“And who exactly is this **Kali**?” she asked.

“Kali—or **Kali Purush**—is the ruler of *Kali Yuga*. He’s not to be confused with the goddess **Kali**, by the way. Kali Purush is a **demonic entity**, and his reign thrives on **deceit, greed, division, and violence**. In essence, he promotes everything that deteriorates human values.”

Atul

I dropped **Sonali** at her house and then tried to reach **Nirmala**, but she wasn’t answering her phone. I had assigned **Abhijit** to accompany her during the shoot, so I called him for an update.

“They’re fully immersed in the second part of the movie,” he informed me. “The production team decided to split it into two parts following the overwhelming response to the first release.”

The first installment had premiered to a **strong opening** and performed **exceptionally well at the box office**. Now, with plans to release the film on our **mind-controlled communication devices**, we’re hoping for a similar response in the tech space. The concept of allowing users to **experience the film from within—by choosing a character and immersing themselves in the narrative—could revolutionize entertainment**.

Unexpected News from Sonali

Later that day, **Sonali called** with some disappointing news. She had been **forced to resign** from her job.

“They said it was because of too many leaves,” she explained, “but I suspect someone filed a complaint against me.”

I didn’t hesitate.

“Join our firm,” I said. “We’re looking for **talented and trustworthy people**, and I’m confident in your abilities.”

Reyansh had also recommended her, and I trusted his judgment—he never endorses anyone without thorough verification.

Nirmala returned after a month of shooting. Most of their shooting is going on abroad. That must be a condition laid down by Ananthu. He didn’t shoot in India. His entire schedule was filmed abroad. Kumar did not seem to have any objection to that. He told Monika to use whatever money she needed. Officially the movie is produced by a Hollywood LLC. The money comes from several Swiss bank accounts. It must be Kumar does not want Ananthu to be out of sight, so he lets the movie go into the sequel. So with Ananthu, Nirmala was also busy with the shooting schedules.

After returning to Mumbai, Nirmala called me to come to her house. I went and rang the bell. She opened the door, pulled me in and closed the door behind me. I looked her over, she was in a negligee showing plenty of her beautiful thighs. She is also showing plenty of cleavage. It seemed she was dressed to the kill, kill me with her looks.

I looked into her eyes, they were burning with desire, which brought a heat in me. I caught her in a hug and started

kissing her. That brought a huge reaction from her. She caught me in a bear hug and kissed back. I thought any other person would be dead from that hug. Where did she get that much power? Then I remembered her family history, is she from Asur's family?

I looked into her eyes, they were closed and she had a kind of face on that she wanted to pull all my power from me.

I lifted her holding her ass up and she caught me at the waist with her legs. My dick is pressing her groin area.

She removed her one hand which she was holding my neck and tried to pull my trousers down. Unable to pull down, she put down her legs and sat on her hunch, removed my belt, then buttons, and pulled the zip down. She let the trousers fall to the floor and pulled my underwear a little and brought my dick out. She started to give a blow job.

As I was enjoying the blow job, she looked up and I looked down, she had a smirk on her face. I could not understand her thinking, and then she got up and started to kiss me and remove my shirt at the same time.

She pulled out the shirt and threw it aside and pulled up my banyan or vest and threw it aside too.

I stepped out of my trousers and holding her ass pulled her up.

Next, she removed the negligee she was wearing, dropping it to the floor. She pulled down the underwear and let it drop to the floor. She is fully naked and I am only in my briefs. Now she pulled it down and let it fall to the ground. While kissing me, she guided me to the sofa in the hall. She pushed me to the sofa and sat on me her legs on both sides of me. She moved a little front so my dick would slide into her vagina. She started moving up and down with my hardened dick moving inside her. She arched back when she must have climaxed. But she did not stop her thrusts. She

was matching my power with her powers. It seems she gained powers during the last month she was away, or is it keeping away from me keeping her up on her sex drive?

She got up from me and sat back facing the other side. Now my dick was touching her asshole. She gently guided my dick into her hole, moving up and down rhythmically.

I am having the best sex of my life and I caught her boobs guiding her up and down. She was moaning with each thrust she gave. Hearing her moan brought out the animal in me. It was as if she was bringing out another man who was hidden inside. I started to give her thrust for thrust, which brought me to the climax or maybe it was the tightness of her asshole. She must have felt my semen entering her asshole, she stopped and got up and picked a paper napkin from the tea table and rubbed her asshole. She sat back on me sideways and started to kiss me. Today she was taking the lead and I let her lead me.

She got up pulled me up and led me to the bathroom.

We entered the bathroom naked. She turned the shower and mild hot water started to flow from above. It seems she came prepared and planned everything.

I started to kiss her, started from her ears and came to her boobs. I spent considerable time licking and kissing and pressing her nipples with my lips cupped her breasts put my face between them and moved my head from side to side, I came down to her navel by sitting down and further down to her pubic area which was clean shaved. I put my tongue between her lips and went in search of her cunt, which brought a reaction from Nirmala, she arched back with pleasure and moaned a little.

She caught my hair and pulled me closer to her and when I thought she had enough, I stood up and started to kiss her on the mouth. She caught my dick and tried to guide it into

her cunt. But she came short as it was just touched outside the lips of her cunt.

I turned her other side and bent her forward a little and entered her from behind. I caught her hips and started to move her front and back. After infinity, I came into this world when Nirmala said stop breathlessly. I slowed and released my semen into her and stood there absorbing the feeling. Nirmala turned off the water and handed me a towel. I dried myself put it around my midriff and came out to where my clothes were spread on the floor beside the door.

I slipped into my **briefs and trousers**, gathered the rest of my clothes in one hand, and went to sit on the **sofa**.

A few moments later, **Nirmala** stepped out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. Without a word, she disappeared into her bedroom, calling over her shoulder, "I'll change and be back."

I closed my eyes and leaned back to rest for a bit. When I opened them again, she was handing me a **steaming cup of coffee**.

She had changed into a **stylish top and skirt**—not exactly a mini, but short enough to sit just above her knees. She looked **gorgeous**, effortlessly blending elegance with allure.

I smiled and asked, "So, what's next?"

She replied without hesitation, "Let's go to a movie."

"Did you get a chance to watch the first part of *Kaliyuga Mahabharatam*?"

"No," she said with a shake of her head. "I haven't had time with all this shooting."

“Then let’s watch it now,” I said, pulling out my phone. I called the distributor and arranged for two tickets. “Go to the manager,” he told me. “He’ll hand them over.”

At the Theatre

I drove us to the theatre, parked, and escorted Nirmala to the **manager’s office**. Recognizing us, the manager came out, shook my hand warmly, and greeted Nirmala with a smile. He personally walked us to the entrance gate and instructed the staff to show us to our seats.

We settled in, and as the theatre lights dimmed, I glanced around. Surprisingly, no one seemed to recognize Nirmala.

Soon, the movie began.

Watching *Kaliyuga Mahabharatam*

I was completely absorbed in the film, trying to understand how its **mythological narrative mirrored our real-life experiences**. My father had often said that this story was **somehow connected to us**. The characters—particularly *Asur* and his associates—bore uncanny similarities to individuals we had encountered in real life.

It was even more eerie considering **Nirmala’s lineage**. According to Kumar, she was the **great-great-granddaughter of Acharya**, a renowned healer in the story, who had aided **Bhavani’s daughter-in-law** in conceiving a child—suggesting a highly advanced understanding of **artificial insemination**, far ahead of its time.

Then came a scene that truly caught my attention: **Kavari’s son and daughter being sent in a spaceship to a Rakshasa stronghold**. I couldn’t make sense of it at first. Why would someone send their children to such a place?

But as I watched, I began to wonder—**was this fiction? Or memory masked as myth?** After all, how else would *Surpanaka* and *Indrajit* have arrived on Earth in a spaceship?

If we accepted that this film wasn't just a mythological drama but a **coded historical record**, then Nirmala's ancestry gained even more significance. *Acharya* wasn't just a sage—he was a **scientific pioneer**, and his descendants may carry knowledge or traits critical to this unfolding cosmic battle.

The second half of the movie explored the **intergenerational consequences** of war, love, and betrayal. Children of rival factions fell in love. Family drama ensued. Tensions escalated when the parents—once enemies—accused each other of using their children for revenge.

Just as the tension peaked, the **intermission** was announced.

Intermission Twist

We stepped out for refreshments. Nirmala went to **freshen up**, and I waited with snacks in hand.

But she didn't return.

I walked toward the restrooms, and found her **surrounded by a group of fans**, asking for selfies, recognizing her from the movie promotions. She smiled politely, trying to handle the attention.

I stepped in gently, held her hand, and said, "Let's head back."

She nodded, relieved, and we returned to our seats just as the lights dimmed.

The Cliffhanger

The movie's second half deepened the mystery. Several new plot threads were introduced, but not all resolved. The story ended on a **cliffhanger**, clearly setting the stage for **Part Two**.

As the credits rolled, I sat there thinking—not just about the story, but about **how much of it was rooted in truth**, and what it meant for all of us going forward.

To be continued