



THREE IDIOTS AND A BRAVE MAN

Kumar's Love series

RAVIKIRAN

Three Idiots and a Brave Man

Series: Kumar's Love Life

By Ravikiran

Co-Authored by R Kumar

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email: ravi_kp_com@yahoo.com, admin@ravikirantechnosoft.in

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About the Author

Ravikiran is a Software Professional with many years of experience in Software development, Management, and consulting. These books are based on Kumar's Love Life series. The stories are based on alternate universe theory. These are also spinoffs, based on the previous story in the series, still, they can be read as separate books.

This book is a spinoff of Three Idiots and a wise man. If you have read that book, you can skip Part 1 of this book.

Foreword

This book is a part of 8 books series on Kumar's Love Life. One major point used in this series are the is Timeline's effects on the main protagonist in this story, that is Kumar. In this story, he is most affected by the events in other timelines. How they affect him and form a part of his life is explained in detail here. The last book in the series Three Idiots and an Innocent man : The final chapter will unveil the forces behind the timelines and their plan of action on the people of the earth. What is their motive behind experimenting on timelines? Which will take us to the next in the series, how they are countered by the many characters in these series.

Prologue

Each person tells the story in the first person. Intertwined stories of Three Idiots and a Brave Man. The story starts in the year 1979 after the summer holidays. How the four persons meet and what their experiences in his life are the story.

This story has references to the characters from the previous books. Sneha, Sahithi, Sunitha, Loveleen and Nandini. These books include:

Unlucky in Love by R Kumar and Ravikiran

Lucky in Love and Unlucky in Life by R Kumar and Ravikiran

Three Idiots and a Wise Man by Ravikiran and R Kumar

Three Idiots and an Innocent Man by Ravikiran and R Kumar

And also has references to

Three Idiots and a Foolish Man by Ravikiran and R Kumar

Cast of Characters

1. Kumar: The Brave man in the story, was born in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India in 1964. The story starts with him entering college.
2. Sreenivas alias Sreenu: is Kumar's first friend from college, they hit off well from the first day.
3. Pradip: Sreenu's schoolmate and their close friend.
4. Sneha: Kumar's love interest and college mate.
5. Kirit Trivedi: Manager cum owner's son with a tin packing manufacturing company
6. Sahithi: met Kumar when she met with an accident
7. Atul: Sneha and Kumar's son born 21 Jan 1987
8. Reena: Sneha and Kumar's daughter and Atul's twin sister
9. Dhruv: Loveleen's son was born on 21 May 1993
10. Leena: God-given daughter
11. Mahira Sheikh: Marketing professional
12. Dolly: Mahira's friend and Kirit's love interest
13. Tony: Works under Mahira as a Courier boy
14. Peggy: Tony's estranged wife
15. Maria: Peggy's Sister
16. Sunitha Works as Air Hostess, Kumar's love interest
17. Loveleen Owner of Loveleen's Interior Decorating Services
18. Nishitha Patel: Partner in Software firm and Sahithi's colleague
19. Pauleen Fernandes Telephone operator with the firm
20. Dinesh Deshpande: Vakola Shakha Pramukh
21. Rajesh: Software developer
22. Nandini works as a trainee in a hospital.
23. Jocelyn Fernandes (Joy) – Kumar saved her from the sea.

PART 1

Kumar joins Jr. College

Chapter 1

The year 1979, the month of June.

Sreenu

It was the first day of college. Classes start at 10 am. My brother dropped me at the college by rickshaw. I was there by 9:30 am. I looked up where my class would be and went up to my class. The class is big and had three rows of benches. Around 8 benches for a row. I found a bench in the second row of the centre row and put my new notebook on the table. I looked around the room students were coming one by one. To my left were benches for girls. It was customary in this college for the girls to occupy the benches to the left. I did not find any known faces. It is now 9:45 am. One dusky boy around 5 feet 4 inches in height wearing spectacles standing at the door looking around for a place to sit. When I saw him, I thought I found a scapegoat. I can ridicule him, call him names, and generally make fun of him. He is the perfect guy to be bullied. I called him to my table and told him to sit there. He obliged by putting his notebook beside my notebook and said His name is Kumar. I said my name is Sreenivas people call me Sreenu.

Kumar

It was my first day in college. I was away for 2 years from Vijayawada. Up to 8th, I studied in Vijayawada, I studied my 9th in Vizag and my 10th in the village. Due to my father's job postings, I had to go to different places. Now I joined college which is quite a distance, it took me around 30mins to walk from home to college. At the time of my SSC exams, I used to get headaches. After coming back to Vijayawada, I checked my eyes, and the doctor gave me a negative number for my spectacles. I brought a spectacle and was wearing it for a month. By now I become quite comfortable wearing them. I stood at the door of the classroom and looked around the room. It had 3 rows of benches, last row girls were sitting and the other two were occupied by boys. I have a first bench syndrome if there is one. I prefer to sit on the first bench. I feel if I don't get to sit on the first bench, I would get lesser marks. When in 7th standard when the first bench was not vacant, I used to sit on the first bench without a table. I used to put books on the thigh and used to write. On the 10th even though I joined 1 week late I could occupy 1st bench and be the first person on the bench. I looked around found no first benches free. Then one person saw me and called me with his hand signs. I went to him, he said his name was Sreenu. I said I am Kumar. He said you can sit with me. I dropped my notebook on the table.

Pradip

I am Pradip Agarwal. Business is our profession. I know Sreenu for the last 5 years. We both went to the same school and we both have businesses on the same Lane. We had a wholesale business of medicines. Sreenu's eldest brother runs a typing institute another elder brother runs a tent house, where they rent tents and utensils for functions. Besides our shop is their type institute and opposite to that is their tent house. I came to the class and found Sreenu talking to a new boy, I went to Sreenu and said you also joined this course. He said yes, we business people should take commerce, which is suitable for us. Sreenu introduced us. Finding an empty seat at his table I dropped my book and sat beside Kumar.

Sneha

In the 10th standard, I got 59% marks. I thought I cannot offer to take science and should take commerce. However, I applied to both the streams of Science and Commerce, I got admission in commerce, so I joined commerce. I went to the classroom and looked around, there are three rows of benches and on the rows farther to the door, where some girls were sitting. The other two rows were occupied by boys. My eyes fell on the second bench in the centre row, a dusky boy seemed familiar. We had a clinic on our lane and he seemed to visit the clinic regularly. I also saw him on their terrace sometimes. I found him looking at me, I gave him half a smile and I went and sat on the second bench behind some girls.

Chapter 2

Kumar

We had 3 classes of 1 hour each in the mornings and 2 classes of 1 hour each in the afternoons. We had 10 minute break after 2 classes. At 1:00 pm we had our lunch break of 1:30 hrs. The college was quite a distance from one town and the bus service was erratic. Students were given ample time to go and come back for lunch. Classes would run up to 4:30 pm. We had 5 subjects, of which 2 are languages and non-language are Commerce, Economics, and Civics (CEC) and languages are English and Telugu. After a week Sreenu started his ragging of me. He would call me names like Chasmi (one who wears spectacles), Nalloda (one whose skin is dark), etc. Once he was telling Pradip, he did not have it for urinating, he had a hole. I didn't understand what he is referring to then. I just smiled and let it ride. After some time finding no reaction from me he stopped bullying me. I thought patience is what wins in the long run. Instead of fighting with him, I made it so he would stop calling me names. If I fought with him, all the other students would have started calling those names. After college, I would go home and drop off my books, freshen up, and used to go to my grandfather's clinic. I would help him, with the patients by giving numbers to patients, calling them one by one, prepare syringes. Then we used to have glass syringes with steel-tipped needles. We had to sanitize after every use by boiling in the water. One day Sneha came with a fever. I recognized her from our class. Her house is the first one on the lane. She stays on the first floor. I asked her what happened, she said she had a fever from the morning. I checked the waiting patients and said I will send her inside. After the patient came from the room I took her to my grandfather and said she is my classmate and she had a fever. He said let me check gave her a thermometer and asked her to put it in her mouth. He took his stethoscope and checked her breathing. He said not a big problem and gave her some medicine and said to take it for 2 days 3 times a day. I took her outside and told her don't worry, by tomorrow morning it will clear up and she will attend classes tomorrow. I thought I should not send her home alone and said I will drop you at your home. I told the next patient to go inside and took her to her home, it was close by and waited on the road waiting to see her going up the floor. She came to the balcony and waved at me, I waved back and went back to the clinic. Sometimes grandfather sends me to get some medicines. I started going to Pradip's shop to get medicines. I had to pass Sreenu's tent shop while going to the medical shop. If Sreenu is there I would say hi to him, normally he would call inside saying have a tea and go. If the

medicines are urgent, I would say later and would go to the medical shop else if nothing urgent, I used to go inside and he would send some servant to get tea for us. We would stand at the entrance to the shop looking outside and drink our tea. There used to be two sisters walking past the shop. They were from our college but the science stream. Sreenu said showing them, I like the younger one from our school. They were from our caste and our families know each other. Now I started looking for her. I would wait at his shop with him until they pass on the road.

Sneha

From morning I was feeling feverish, I did not go to college. By evening the fever was not receding, I asked my sister to take me to the clinic. She dropped me outside the clinic and went away. I went inside and stood there. Kumar came and asked me what happened? I said had a fever from the morning. He checked my forehead with his hand and said only slight fever, I will get you checked immediately. When the patient exited from the room he took me inside instead of other waiting patients. Told the doctor that I am his classmate and I had come with a slight fever. The doctor gave me the thermometer and told me to put it in my mouth and checked my breathing, and then checked the thermometer and said no problem only fever, and gave me some medicines. Kumar bought me out and told the next patient to go in took me to my home left me at the stairs and waited until I went up to the first floor and waved to him. Then he turned and went away. I thought so nice of him, so concerned for my health. Good boy I said to my mom, Kumar is the doctor's grandson, he came and dropped me at home and did not even take fees. My mother said is that so?

Sreenu

I was sitting in my brother's tent house. Whenever my brother has some work, he would make me sit in the shop and go. If he does not have any work, I would go and sit at the typing institute. I would practice and look after the students. One evening I was sitting at the tent house and was looking outside. Kumar was passing, he said hi, I said hi. He stood there hesitating, I asked him to come inside have tea, and go. He hesitated a second and came inside. I asked Ramu to bring tea for us. He went and bought tea in a flask and poured and gave us tea. I looked out and found Jamuna and her sister Savitri going to their home. I told Kumar I like Jamuna from school. We were together in school. I like her for 5 years. She is our caste. Our families know each other. After finishing my studies, I will send my brother to their home for asking her hand in marriage. From that

day Kumar used to come to our shop and stand with me waiting for them to pass. He must be interested in Savitri. What a man? What he is doing? He is not from our caste, why is he following our girls? I am not wrong in ragging him. In the meantime, my brother came and told me to collect money from someone. I said Kumar let us go and took him on one of the rickshaws to collect money and came back. Kumar went away. My brother asked me why are you taking him with you, I said for company. The next day afternoon my brother took me on the rickshaw to the college. I found Kumar walking on the road, I stopped and asked him to get in the rickshaw. He hesitated and said it is no problem, I can go on a walk. I said come on no problem. He sat down and we went to college. These rickshaws are rented by us exclusively for our use. We pay the daily rent and extra based on trips.

Pradip

Sreenu brought Kumar to our shop and told him he can buy medicines from us, we give good prices. Normally we don't sell loose medicines. He wants medicines for the clinic and would buy in sheets, it is acceptable to sell to him. We agreed to sell him and told him to ask for any medicines which are not available in the market, we would get them for you. Give us a list of medicines normally prescribed by your grandfather, we would keep them in stock for you.

Kumar seems nice boy, we all help in our business, he helps his grandfather in the clinic. I heard his father is working in Bombay. I heard about Bombay, never been there. Sreenu unnecessarily bullies him. I told Sreenu not to do that. He used to be that way in school also. That is why he did not have many friends in school. I speak with him because we are neighbours. He always talks about Jamuna. She is good-looking, but he could not even talk to her. He adores her from far. What a cinematic love story.

Chapter 3

Kumar

The next day I went to college and when I saw Sneha, I went to her and asked her how is your health now. She said the fever came down last night only. Now I am fine, so I came to the college. I came back to my bench and she went to her bench and sat down. Sreenu asked me what are you talking about with her. I said yesterday she came to the clinic with a fever, I am asking her how she is feeling now. He said Ok. Now Pradip asked what happened? Sreenu said Sneha had a fever and went to his grandfather's clinic and now she is fine and came to the college. Pradip said huh, huh. Sneha and her bench mates were talking in a low tone. Her bench mates looked at me and turned their gaze away.

Sneha

The fever came down in the night itself. By morning I was feeling well and decided to go to college. When I entered the class, Kumar came and was asked me how I am feeling, with so much concern on his face. I smiled and said I am ok and went and sat on my bench. My bench mates were asking why haven't come to college? What Kumar is asking you? I said I had a fever and went to his grandfather's clinic and his grandfather checked and gave me some medicines, he came with me and dropped me at my house, and waited until I reached my door. They said Oh! And looked towards him. I blushed a little. I tapped on the shoulder of the girl next to me.

Sreenu

Now see that in the first year only Kumar is behind girls. Now, Jamuna, I like her for the last 5 years, she is in the same college, but I could not talk to her. I could talk to her only if we meet at a function. Now Kumar is meeting her at home and speaking to her in college, a lucky guy.

I have to pass on a message to Jamuna, about how should I do it. I will take Kumar with me. I asked Kumar to come with me and we both went to the science wing, which is between periods. I went to her class called Jamuna out and passed on the message. We both came back to our class. One work is completed. I am finding him dependable. He would come with me whenever I asked him to come. He would not make excuses, even if he has some work, he would say we need to come back fast. The only problem with him is he doesn't

like to ask for money from his grandfather. What can you do without some money?

Chapter 4

Kumar

After college, I went to the clinic. On the way, I looked up at Sneha's balcony. She was standing there, when I looked up she waved her hand and mouthed hi. I waved and said Hi in a low voice. When the clinic cleared of patients, I came out and stood outside the door. Sneha came down and was speaking to her neighbours standing on the steps of the road. I smiled from the clinic door and she smiled back from there. After finishing talking to the neighbour she came slowly to the clinic as if to get checked. I asked her to come inside. I sat her at the waiting patients' bench, we started chatting. That day patients were very few, if any came I sent them directly to see the doctor. We could chat without interruption. I had some notes with me, whoever comes would think we are studying. She was copying the notes she missed classes. After some time, her sister came looking for her and said mummy is calling you. She said let me finish this chapter, I will come in five minutes. Her sister went away. She said I will meet you later and went away. Normally we have homework or classwork only for accounts. In other subjects, we have to take down notes, when the sir is giving notes or listen to the sir explaining. Our Telugu sir was most popular. He used to wear spectacles. He used to press the centre of the spectacles with his forefinger up and used to explain the story. If he pressed his finger on the spectacles meant he will be explaining something romantic. Telugu Chapters were of two types Poetry and Prose. Poetry was of higher language Telegu, to the standard of Sanskrit. Prose or stories are also of the same language contain very high language Sanskrit words. He used to explain them in such a way student would listen with apt attention. In stories like Shakuntalam, which is a love story, he would explain love in such a way students don't want to miss his class. My favourite subject is accounts. I used to finish solving all the questions beforehand and look at the sir when he explains the answers on the board. One day I and Sreenu bet that my answer is correct and he said my answer is wrong. As my balance sheet is balancing, I thought my answer is correct. He said the bet would be the loser had to take others to a movie. When the final answer is written on the board, he has changed one item and a different answer came out and my answer was wrong. Next week I had to take him to the movie. I had to borrow money from my grandfather. Then I decided not to bet with anyone even when I am sure I am right. One day my grandfather went to meet his lawyer. He had land in Nakrekal. It was given to him for treating the landowner with some serious ailment. The patient was cured by my grandfather's

medicines and in appreciation of his service, the landowner had given him a piece of land near a school. Some people in connivance with the gram panchayath had taken illegal possession of land and built themselves a shopping complex. The lawyer had filed a case in court for taking possession of land.

I was sitting on the terrace and finishing my accounts homework. Sneha came up her terrace and waved her hand. By showing her hand she asked why are you not at the clinic? I showed her that by sign doctor is away. She showed by sign come, I showed sign wait I am coming.

I took the keys to the clinic went there and opened the door. She came after 5 mins with her books. We put books in front of us as if we were studying. While chatting we completed our homework, helping each other. After half an hour, her sister came searching for her. She was asking where I have to search for you? I thought where you went away from the terrace. Mummy is calling you. Sneha said let me finish this question, I will come, muttering something under her breath, her sister went away. Sneha said, "now I have to go, I don't know what she will tell mother."

I said "Ok bye, I will close the clinic and will go"

Sneha

I left the clinic with books in my hand, and I was thinking about what Choti was telling mummy. Seeing books in my hand, the mummy was about to say something, interrupting her I said "I had a doubt, so I went to ask Kumar, he is the best student in our class." Mummy said Okay, Okay, come and have dinner, it is getting cold. We finished the dinner in silence. I was thinking about Kumar. I wanted to spend more time with him. In college, we can't speak with each other. After college only, a limited time is available. The best time would be coming and going time from college. At present for my transport father arranged for a rickshaw. I should ask him to join me in the rickshaw or go for a walk with him. I have to plan something. Thinking about him, I went to sleep.

The next day I asked the rickshaw puller, can I have someone else with me in the rickshaw. He said to have an extra person, you have to pay extra. My payment is made by my father, if I ask him to pay more he will doubt. Kumar may not have extra money, let me ask him, based on his answer, I will plan something. The next day I asked Kumar what do you think of coming with me in a rickshaw? He said Ok. I said now my father pays 10 rupees for a month for the rickshaw, if you pay another 5 he will take both of us. Kumar said that his father is in Bombay, he sends 200 rupees to my grandfather, which he keeps. I don't

have any money. If I have to pay for a rickshaw, I have to ask my grandfather for it. I don't feel like asking for money from my grandfather. If I take any money I feel obliged. Because he is feeding me and giving me a place to stay, I am working at the clinic for free. I said ok if you feel so strongly about it, don't ask him for money. We will think of another way. The next day I made an agreement with the rickshawala, he will take us to college for 4 days in a week and he will take 2 days off and we will go by walk for those two days. He can choose those two days, whenever he wants off, tell me a day in advance. Now Kumar comes in the morning and waits at the clinic and I will go pick him up and we both go to college together. While coming back, he will drop off somewhere at the road turn. Those two days we can walk together. It is a long walk of 30 minutes. But 30 minutes feels like 5 minutes if I walk with him.

Kumar

I felt very embarrassed when Sneha asked me to pay for the rickshaw. I never felt bad about not having any money as of that day. I was always aloof about money. If I have it, I can spend it, if don't have it no problem, it was my outlook on money. But saying no to Sneha, I felt my stomach turning inside out. I kept my feelings inside and said to her I can't get the money. She said ok, but it seems she is disappointed. But what can I do, I don't want to ask my grandfather for money. The elder son of my aunt also stays with us. His parents have gone to Madras. But their family was with them for a long time. For as long as I remember aunt with her children stayed with her grandparents. My Uncle is in the Military, sometimes when they are in cities, my aunt used to go live with him. If he is posted in sensitive areas, she would come and stay with her parents. Now my uncle is retired due to some health issue, he got a posting in Madras Customs and they went there leaving elder son here to complete his studies. Now he is in 8th standard, he is English medium school where Sreenu studied. It would take him 5 minutes to reach school. But for everything he comes for competition with me. Grandfather used to have lots of money, he lost all the money in the Lottery tickets business. He took the dealership and was supplying lottery tickets to sellers. He used all the money for the distribution of prizes and Lottery people refused to reimburse him and he lost all money and he has to look after the clinic to earn day-to-day expenses. The only land he had in Nakrekal was land grabbed by some people. He was spending all the money on court cases and lawyer fees. I felt helpless in this matter. However, Sneha made a compromise in this matter. She asked the rickshawala to take two days off and take us for 4 days. This way we could ride together for four days and walk for two days. I joined the Sreenu brothers type institute to learn typing.

First, he gave me the worst typewriter in the institute. When I hit a key, it jumps two letters. He said it is the typewriter given to beginners. I felt like when I joined 1st class, I had to learn the first letters. After a week he gave me a better typewriter. Now I can learn to type faster. I always pick up things very fast. After exams, Sreenu asked shall we go to a movie. I said ok. He said we will go to a matinee. I said but I will miss typing class. He said if the next class if it is vacant you can use it. I thought if I had informed Sreenu, it would be enough. But when I was typing in the next class, his brother came to me and asked why are you typing without permission. I said I took permission from Sreenu. He did not say anything. It was on a month's end. Next week I would be going to Bombay. I told Sreenu, that I will be going to Bombay, so I am not paying this month's fees. Later he came to me and said, you should have taken permission from my brother. I said no problem, he must have thought I was stopping due to his brother's scolding.

Sneha

One day father saw me walking from the road end towards our house. Kumar was walking behind 10 paces. Father asked me why are you coming on walking. I said the rickshaw dropped me at the corner as he had some urgent work. Father said Okay. I felt relieved it has somewhat come out in the open. I have to see how long I can contain this matter. The next day to show I came by rikshaw, I called mom from the road asking for some money. When she sent money with Choti, I took the rickshaw to take me to the shop and came back home by walk. Normally the rickshawala would put down the top, so the heads will be hidden from anyone watching from the road and also give shade from sunlight. The Dussehra holidays came. Now we could sit in the clinic in the name of combined studies. Once I told my mother I am going to the movies with my girlfriends and we went to a movie. We sat in the hall holding each other's hands and watched the movie. I thought this is the way to enjoy life. Navaratri is celebrated in Vijayawada in a unique way. There would be a procession in the night with different characters from Puranas. Leading the procession would be Narsimha Avatar. The person who wore his head would be moving from side to side. It was said wearing the head of Narsimha would bring Narsimha on his body. Then there would be a line of chariots with Ram, Lakshman, Sita, and Hanuman. Krishna, and his wives. Parashurama, and the likes of him. They will be passing on the road for nine days. It will culminate with Durga Devi's and Shiva's Boat Yatra in River Krishna. Diwali came and went. Pongal holidays came and went. Now the 1st year exams came. We were either studying in a clinic or on our terraces, looking at each other. Exams finished and holidays came. Kumar

wanted to go to Bombay for the holidays. After his family went to Bombay, he has not gone there even once. He told me to come to the clinic so that he will call from Bombay. For that, he had to go to his father's office. He told me to come on Thursday at around 12:30 pm. If he has a change of time he will inform his grandfather. After 2 weeks he called the clinic and we spoke for 15 minutes. Next time he called to say that he will be back in Vijayawada next week.

Kumar

I had to book tickets to Bombay 2 weeks in advance for me and my grandfather's nephew, who wants to come with me. His father, my grandfathers' brother is a businessman and they spoiled him rotten. He smokes and drinks even though he is younger than me. We both took Konark to express from Vijayawada and got down at Dadar central. My brother came to pick us up. We caught a local train to Santacruz caught a bus and reached Vakola. There we had to walk a little into the colony. We reached a wall between our colony and Airport. Our flat is on the first floor. It consists of two rooms, a combined kitchen. The Backroom is big, the front room contains an attached bathroom and toilet separately. In the connecting place, a washbasin is put up. The kitchen extended partly into this room, so the front room became small. In the Bombay area is everything. Two rooms are luxurious. There are class 4 quarters in our colony they are so tiny and they don't have attached bathrooms instead have common bathrooms. Those quarters look like matchboxes. They have around 20 to 30 flats in a single long building. Ours is six flats a building. Flats don't touch each other. Three sides are flats are connected through the walkway. Ground floor houses have an open area, where they can have gardens. But we had a good view of the airport. There are no steps to the terrace. We overcame this by climbing the walls. We had two neighbours belonging to Kerala on our floor and below us on the ground floor are a family from Gadwall of the Himachal region. And beside them are two Maharashtrian families. Gadwalls and Maharashtrians are good friends, they were there for a long time. Gadwalls are a family of 2 sons and two daughters. Elder sons work in Railways and others are students. Maharashtrians are three girls who call their dad Dada, Mummy aayi. While I was there Maharashtrian's Elder daughter met with an accident while returning from Temple. A military van hit her and run away. One man took her to the hospital, he came to their home after putting her in the hospital. His whole shirt was drenched in blood. She did not survive and the military people said it was not our van.

My mothers' cousin is a troublemaker. While he spent all of his time looking at Airplanes, I spent time walking around and looking at the surrounding areas. At 15 mins distance is Kalina had a university campus. The station is around 15 mins by walk. The bus ticket cost 20 paise. Those were days. When I went to market it was on the roadside people make makeshift shops and sell vegetables. Behind the market is a bakery. There they sell Pav. I think the price is 10 for 1 rupee. They are soft, they are our buns but salty. Buns there in Vijayawada, even Bread tastes sweet. These pavs are salty and not sweet. For 10 paise they give green chilis, ginger, curry leaves, coriander together is called masala. In Vijayawada, we had to purchase everything separately. People are very fashionable. Unlike Vijayawada, most people wear frocks, some churidar. Some people wear more fashionably. One day our neighbour's wife wore a saree without a petticoat and was supposed to go to a party. Here we can sit beside ladies on buses and trains. Which is taboo in Andhra. In Andhra even when we sit beside them at a distance they would look at you like how dare you to sit here. That is the kind of people you see in Bombay. On my ground floor flat, there are two girls elder one is medium built and the younger one is a little plump, very fair, and around 5 feet in height. I liked her at the first look. I used to stand on the steps and wait for her to come out to have a look. Her brother got a job in Railway by getting a BC certificate and their surname is Sharma. He changed his sir name to something else. I couldn't talk fluent Hindi, if anyone asks I used to reply in English. I used to read a lot of books, so I can form words in English, if not perfect at the beginning. As time went on I could speak well enough. Sometimes I had to go to Prabhadevi Office to call my grandfather. There is a bus going there from our area. Otherwise, I had to take a bus to Santacruz station there to Dadar by train and from there had to walk for 20 mins. 2 months went away in a jiffy. We had visited Juhu beach, Chowpaty, Churchgate, Marine drive, VT, Gateway of India, Byculla Zoo. From the Gateway of India, we went to Elephanta caves by boat. The road leading from Churchgate to VT has roadside 2nd hand book shops. I had bought some books there. When the time came to go back to Vijayawada on one side I was happy that I will see Sneha again, on the other side I will be missing Bombay, their girls and beach and everything. I had spent two months there and returned to Vijayawada for 2nd year Inter.

Sreenu

Kumar went away to Bombay for 2 months. It seems he is going angry with me. He thought informing me about the change in timing would be enough. I have troubled him a lot when he is now in college. But now I miss him. He would

come with to anywhere just by asking. Never said he can't or didn't have time or some other reason. I am feeling guilty for ragging him. He never retorted back, everything he took smiling. I am feeling bored with too much work.

Pradip

Why does Sreenu seem sad? Normally he would be enjoying the holidays. This time he seemed different. Is he missing Kumar? Did Kumar have so much influence on him? Or is it because he could not see his girl Jamuna? I asked why he is like that, he did not answer me.

Chapter 5

Kumar

At last back to Vijayawada. Train delayed and we reached around 8 pm. By the time I reached grandfather closed the clinic and was back at home. I came home had a bath and went to the terrace. Sneha was making rounds on the terrace. I waved at her and she waved back. I said by the sign that we will meet tomorrow. She showed ok sign. I went down had dinner, again went up to the terrace had a walk for 20mins and came down and went to sleep.

The next day I went to the clinic on the way waved at Sneha standing on her balcony and then checked the medicines and prepared a list of medicines to be bought and went to Pradip's shop. Gave them the list of medicines and told them to pack and keep them ready with the bill. Then looked up Sreenu. He was not in either shop. I told his elder brother, now I am back and will come back for typing from the evening. Went to the tent house and asked his brother where is Sreenu. He said he went to meet some client. I said I will come back later and went to the Pradip shop collected medicines paid for them and went to the clinic. By this time Sneha came and was waiting for me. I said to her I went to get medicines. There is a shortage of medicines as there is no one to get them.

Sneha

Train supposed to come at 6:30 pm, he should be home by 7 pm. Why is he not coming to the terrace? At last, he came to the terrace and waved to me, I waved back. Now I can sleep peacefully. I missed seeing him for two long months. It was dark but in the little light from street lights, I can see his outline. By seeing him I felt how much I missed seeing him. What would I do if I can't see him forever? If something happens to him can I live? So many thoughts were running through my mind. I shook my head to stop those thoughts, by thinking he is in front of me, that is all I need. Still, there is time till Monday for the colleges to start. New class, how would it be? Have to wait and see.

The next morning, I got up early had a bath and breakfast. I was standing on the balcony and waiting when he will go to the clinic. While passing he waved and went into the clinic. He immediately went somewhere with a list in his hand. I thought must be something urgent, and waited for some time, I couldn't contain my impatience and went to the clinic. I had to wait for some time before Kumar came in with an apologetic face saying sorry, had to get these medicines immediately. I said no problem, I am waiting for you to come. At last, I saw him

from near. Two months is a long time, how I missed him. Did he miss me as much as I missed him? He did not seem to have missed me much, otherwise, he would have waited for me to come. My thoughts were running riot. I shook my head. Kumar asked what happened? I said, "nothing, felt like something fell on my head, it is nothing". I thought he looked at me strangely as if I am going mad. It is true I am going mad, by missing him and now seeing him. He makes me crazy, that is what is happening. Again, my thoughts were running riot. It is not safe, otherwise, I would have hugged him. Now I felt I have to hug him. I know his grandfather had gone home for lunch, would be back after 3 pm. I asked him to show doctor's exam room, he took me inside the room and I took his hand and took him behind the curtain to the checkup table. I stood before and looked into his eyes and hugged him hard and released him and came out and sat in the chair. Kumar came and sat beside me. I said, "I had to do it, I can't contain my impatience anymore". He said "I also needed it, but could not ask for it. Thanks for it." We sat for some time in silence, absorbing the feeling of the hug into our bodies. I got up and said I will come back in the evening and went back home. I had lunch and went and lay on the bed. The after-effects of the hug were making my heart flutter with such a feeling, keeping that feeling in my heart, I dozed off. When I woke up it was 5 pm. I remembered what I told Kumar, I will come back in the evening. I washed my face, put on a bindi, and went by running to the clinic. There was a patient with an injury. Kumar was cleaning the wound and putting on a bandage on the wound. After completing the bandage, he gave some medicine and the patient went away. Now the clinic is empty. By sign, I asked where he said not yet came. I told him to come to the exam room while going to the room. He came behind me and asked what? I want one more hug I said. He closed the door ajar and I again hugged him to my heart's content. I stood for possibly a minute and released him and came out of the room. It was as close as can be possible. I sat down on the chair and his grandfather came inside and asked "any problem" and I said no problem. He went into the room and Kumar came out. Then the deluge of patients started, we did not have much time to talk to each other. I am handing out numbers and Kumar was taking the patients and handing them medicines when they came out. I was helping where ever possible. Two hours went by and the flow of patients decreased. After half an hour all the patients are cleared. I took leave of him and went away. When going home the after-effects of the hug came back to me and hit me in the chest like a pike. I went home in a trance, had food my mother put on the plate and went and laid on the bed thinking about the hug and the press of his body on my chest and the hands around my body.

Kumar

After seeing her after two months bought the memories of the time we spent. I kept staring at her thinking how beautiful she looks in her half saree. When seeing her I forgot the girls I watched in Bombay. I forgot the time I spent there. I felt a twinge of love in my heart for her. This is the first time I felt such a way about anyone. Now I know what love feels like. It is a feeling washing over you, that is love. She asked me to come to the exam room. I took her to the exam room, we went inside and she hugged me from the front. She pressed into me, I put my arms around her hugging her. Her small boobs were pressing into my chest. I felt a small movement in my loins. Before I could react to her hug, she removed my hand from her behind went and sat in a chair. I went and sat beside her. I was still feeling her body around me. We sat there in silence for some time. She got up and said I will come in the evening and went away. The feeling of love I had for her increased many folds. Now I am confused about what I want from her. What I felt for is lust or love. In a confused mind, I went home and had lunch and sat down, thinking what I should do. I reviewed my life, now I am in 2nd year Inter. I have some techniques but not enough to earn a living. I don't have any financial backing from anyone. I am in no position to think about love and what kind of life I can give her? Nothing. I can't give her shelter over her head. I can't keep her fed three times a day. I can't provide her with any comforts she may require. I am a nobody. I don't have any authority to love her. As for the lust, I am not the kind of person, who uses girls and leave them as per convenience. Our parents have inculcated that much In us. I was just confused. After some time, I took the keys to the clinic and went and opened the clinic, and sat down. After some time Sreenu called and said my brother told me that you came back. I asked him are you there for some time. He said yes, I said will come to wait for me and went to his shop. I went inside and sat down. He started to apologize, I have hurt you so much with my words, I missed you so much when you went to Bombay, I realized how much I depend on you, and it was bad of me to talk like that in the past. I said don't worry, I don't keep anything in my mind or heart. I forgot that long time back, but I don't know what I am doing. I fell in love with Sneha. I think she also loves me. I don't know what to do. He asked what age are you 17? Why are you thinking about this now, your whole life is in front of you? You think about the future. What do you want to become? At least finish your degree. Then you can get a job, then you can think of Sneha and her love. If I were in your position, I would do the same. Even though I have two businesses to look after, if I am married now I would not have to worry about money. But I would not do that, I will think of finishing my studies then will think of girls. Don't you think, I could have proposed to Jamuna, I could have done that long back. But what is the use? I

want to become someone, I want to stand on my two feet before I could propose to any girl. After hearing those words, I started thinking, whatever Sreenu says is correct. Now I can't think about Sneha or her love or my lust. I have to think about my studies. I can't forever work for grandfather, I have to make something of myself. I should keep my love for Sneha hidden under my steel interior. I got up and said thanks for the advice and went to the clinic. Grandfather has not yet come, I opened the clinic and sat down. After a few minutes, Sneha came. She must have seen me coming from her balcony. When she entered she asked me where is grandfather, I said not yet here. While walking towards the exam room said to me come with me. I went inside behind her into the room and asked what? She said she wanted one more hug. All my resolve after my talk with Sreenu melted away. I shut the door and hugged her hard. We held together for a minute and I released her and she went and sat in the chair. It was perfect timing, just then grandfather walked in and asked her any problem, she said nothing. He came inside the room, I acted as if adjusting something and went outside. Then patients started coming one by one. The waiting room started to fill and I was sending one by one and looking after the patients. It took us two and half hours to clear the rush. Sneha said bye and went away. Grandfather said close up and come. I cleaned up the room packed the garbage and put it aside. Closed the clinic and reached home.

Chapter 6

The year 1980 Month of June after summer holidays

Sneha

Starting day of college 2nd year. Father decided to drop me at college by his Chetak scooter. Now I don't have a chance of going to college with Kumar. It seems my father has some doubts about me, otherwise, why would he decide to drop me, college is on another side of his regular route. Now he has to drop me off and come back to go to his office. How can I tell Kumar about this? I came out onto the balcony to see if he is anywhere near, to warn him. However, when my father took me to college, I saw him on the clinic's steps, he must be waiting for me. With signs, I told him to go to college on his own. I looked back and he nodded his head. For the 2nd year, we were allotted a new classroom. Students sat as if they were sitting in their seats for the first year. He went back to his seat. My bench mates asked what happened. I told them my father decided to drop me at the college. Did they ask did your father doubted you? I said I don't know, he didn't ask me anything. I also thought, if he had any doubt, he would not let me go to the clinic. I told the mother that I am helping in the clinic during the holidays. I used to go there for the phone call from Bombay. I used to help as well in the clinic. Slowly I learned some works. I told mother I am thinking of going for Nurse training. After doctors' nurses are in demand. With nurse training, I could get a job anywhere. I have not thought about nurse training. Just a reason to go to the clinic. I know my father can't bring me to college every day. It might be something else. So many thoughts were running through my mind. Sir entered and started taking attendance. After that he started the lesson, I turned my mind to the lesson. At the time of the break, Kumar came to me and asked me in a low tone, what happened? I said father decided to bring me to college and I don't know how long will this go on.

Kumar

I was waiting at the clinic for Sneha to come and we will go together to college. I have to start or I will be delayed. I was in two minds, will she come or not. She has not given me any indication that she will miss class today. I collected my books and came out looking towards her house, first I did not see her behind her father, as the scooter crossed me, she told me to go to college with signs. I nodded my head and started to go to college at a brisk pace as not to get delayed. I reached class just 2 minutes to bell. Normally Sneha brings her lunch

box, I used to go home and have lunch and come back. Sometimes Sreenu used to give a lift in his rikshaw, mostly I used to walk to-and-fro. Sneha said you don't go home for lunch, I will bring for two of us. I had a habit of having a hot meal, if she brings it will be cold, I am in two minds to accept her invitation for lunch or go home and have lunch. One is to sit with Sneha and have lunch or walk for 1 hour for lunch. Tough decision to make. Finally decided to go home for lunch, otherwise what they will think at home? The next day her father arranged for a rikshaw for Sneha as usual. It seems he could not contact the rikshawala, so he took her to college himself. So, one problem is solved and our routine of rikshaw and walk continued. Our daily routine of sitting in the clinic in the evening continued. We could finish our homework and help in the clinic and be together for some time. We could accomplish all these being at the clinic in the evenings. On holidays we could spend more time together. After that day when we hugged, we have not attempted that again. I thought if we tried again that what would be our reaction, thinking that got me scared and I avoided getting closer to her. Sitting beside each other, touching each other bodies, and holding hands are more than enough. If I hugged her again, I know I could not contain myself and I don't know what length would I go. We made it a routine. Father asked me would I like to come to Bombay for Dussehra or Pongal holidays. Thinking about what I will miss, I said I could not come as I do not want to inconvenience grandfather and he could not manage the clinic himself. I made a tent on the terrace, we used to make a tent and prepare Diwali crackers when we were small. In the Dussehra holidays, we both took our book to the terrace and told grandfather that we are studying on the terrace. We used to cosy up and used to sit for hours only come down for lunch or tea. I like to sing and I used to sing the latest love songs for her in a low voice. We know nobody will disturb us, the grandmother doesn't come up to the terrace. Those fifteen days were heaven for us. Sometimes Sreenu and Pradip used to come and sit with us. We used to discuss movies current affairs, etc. We are non-vegetarians and Sneha's parents were vegetarians. When asked about us she said to her parents we are Vaishnavas, indicating brahmins. But we are separated from them and we eat non-veg. Some of our relatives perform pujas in the temple as brahmins, they keep to Vegetarianism. She used to have lunch in our home. We normally have non-veg on Sundays only. Slowly she started to have non-veg with me. She liked our food and continued eating with us without informing her family that she is having non-veg with us. When the holidays finished, we went back to our routine.

Sreenu

Colleges have started, now we are in the second year and we had to take studies seriously. We need to at least finish our degree to make something of ourselves. Kumar is not visiting me like before. Only when he comes for medicines, he would visit me. He said he is very busy helping his grandfather. He said now more patients were coming to the clinic. Sometimes patients spill outside to the road. He had to arrange for the patients to sit outside by placing benches. The increase in patients has something to do with Kumar, his way of dealing with patients or their treatment or something. Kumar has charm, he can charm his way into anything. Now Sneha is also helping him at the clinic. They make a good pair. They work in coordination without speaking anything. Just a look from him and she understands him and acts accordingly. I never saw them fighting about anything. I would like to have a relationship like them. I told Pradip about their relationship, he agreed with me and said the best relationship I saw. He said, "I don't know how they will behave once married, but they act like a couple who understand each other". I agreed with him. During the holidays, I went to his house. They made a good place on the terrace to sit. We had a good time discussing things. Time flies there, why I don't know. Being with them makes a unique experience. They are like two people with one soul, that's all I can say about them. What happens in the future only God can tell. Tomorrow classes start, I have to prepare.

Pradip

Had a long talk with Sreenu. He seems to be jealous of Sneha and Kumar. He was told they were the best couple and all, but his demeanour shows he didn't have a relationship like them. He could not even talk to his lady. Only speaks to her at functions where both of them attend. That also only hi and bye. He has to look after his brothers' businesses. I have to look after our business. Kumar has to help in the clinic, that too he is using to his advantage. He takes Sneha's help and over that he is with her the whole time. Now in the holidays in the name of studies, he takes her to his terrace and has gala time. I don't know what they do the whole time. He is a lucky guy to get a girl like her. He must have been born into a good start. He kills two birds with one shot. When Sreenu said we should be like them with our girls, I totally agreed with him. I would be getting married to a girl, my family fixes, that is the custom. They will look at girls' families, their business worth, and how it will help them to grow in business. My family is business-minded. We are a Marwari family, business-minded and Sreenu is also from the Vysya family, they are also business people. I don't know how they feel about Sreenu's marriage. Maybe they want him to have arranged marriage. So many things to consider and we have four to five years for this to happen, I

should not think about this now. Mostly our girls are fair but are they beautiful is another matter. My family only looks at their worth, not the girl's beauty, over that they will say how beautiful she looks, even though she is an ugly duckling. That is the problem with arranged marriages. Previously they did not consult the boys before fixing the marriage, he could look at her face only on the first night that's also in dull light. The whole day they will be covering their faces with their sarees. Those were days, nowadays the families let us at least have a look at the girls and sometimes they give permission to speak to her. Otherwise, we did not know if she is dumb until a few days after marriage, they can always act if they don't talk in front of elders. After marriage, we can't do anything. It is not like in western countries we can divorce, even if we raise our voice, the families would silence us saying aren't we living together, it is never heard in our community about divorce, they would say our nose will be cut in front of elders. They are concerned more about their noses and not about our life. I don't know why they always bring their noses in between as if they are living for their noses. It is their noses or their turbans. Even if I love someone, I couldn't ask my family for love marriage, first, they will see how much money she had, next, they will see if she is from Marwari or not. Next, they will see if she is beautiful or not, if they did not find her attractive, they will reject her instead of seeing her from my eyes. It is now a little better from the 1960s or previous to that. The college starts tomorrow and I hope I will find a junior to my liking.

Chapter 7

Kumar

Our routine continued for the year. Daily we were going to college either by rickshaw or by walk as the day demanded. On holidays we were spending on our Terrace. Our tent we made strong. On the ground we built a stage to raise the bed, water will not seep onto the bed. We used wooden planks and grass to build a stage on that we used old bedsheets to make up the bed. It is very cosy to sit and sleep. I could sleep in the nights there. Except in winter, it wouldn't be very cold at night. Other times there would be dew early in the morning. It would form like raindrops in the morning. Our tent would save us from the dew. I drew a wire to the first floor and arranged for light. I bought a bed light switch and I can switch it on and off from the terrace. I am always trying to improve things. I will not sit down until everything is perfect.

Now Pongal holidays have come, they will be from Christmas to Pongal. It will be the last holiday before exams. Holidays have come and gone. We enjoyed those 20 days. Also studied and worked in the clinic. This year Sneha's grades have improved from last year. So, Sneha's mother had not objected to our combined studies. Now she is also learning in the clinic, once her mother cut her finger during vegetable cutting, Sneha swung into action, cleaned her cut, and put on a bandage. She bought a TT Injection from the clinic and gave it to her mother. Her mother is happy that she learned a lot from going to the clinic. 2nd-year exams are nearing. We were given preparatory holidays. Now both Sreenu and Pradip have come to study with us. Exams have come and we did well in the exams. I booked my tickets to go to Bombay. Only one week for us to be together. Daytime we are spending in our tent and other times we are at clinic or she is at her home and I am my home. Before I am going to Bombay We thought we should be together for one whole day. We fixed a day took some snacks, water, and some books retired to our tent, and closed the curtain. We spent a full day there reading books, singing songs, generally cosying up with each other. We had a wonderful time and spent the available time to our heart's content.

I took leave from Sreenu and his brothers, Pradip, and last Sneha. I caught the train and went away to Bombay, unaware that would be my last sighting of Sneha.

Sneha

Exams were completed and we spent one day together before he went away. The day has arrived and he took leave from us and caught the train. I went to the station to give a sendoff. My eyes were filled, when will I see him next. Will he come back in two months or will he stay back in Bombay as his father suggested? Only time will tell.

Sreenu, Pradip

We all went to the station to give a sendoff. We spent two years together. Done a lot of things together. After completing Inter now he is going away to Bombay, will he return or will he join degree in Bombay? What will become of Sneha? Questions and Questions with no answers in sight.

PART 2

Marriage with Sneha

Chapter 1

The year 1981 month of May

Kumar

After a year I am back in Bombay. Nothing has changed. The boy who is staying on the ground floor now has come to the 10th. He called me to play with their cricket team. They made the small pitch in an open place. I brought a tennis ball for them. We played from 5 pm until we can't see the ball. Then one boy took us to wada pav bandi. We all had wada pav there. This is the first time I had wada pav. They break pav in half put on green chutney and put a wada in between. They also serve bajji pav. Instead of wada, they put four bhajjis in between the pav. Bajji pav was better tasting than wada pav. He paid for the wada pavs. I was told he works as a lineman in the telecom dept. and extra money he earns, he spends like this.

After a week my father spoke to the grandfather and he said that Sneha remembers Kumar. My father asked who is Sneha? She is my classmate and she also helps in the clinic. I left her to help grandfather, so I could come here. I will come after two days to talk to grandfather, I said. After two days I went to Prabhadevi and spoke to Sneha. She said she is doing ok. Everything working fine at the clinic. After two days grandfather called and said Sneha went to her grandparents' house for the summer holidays, now he is without a hand to help out. I said I will ask Sreenu to help out a little. Especially in the evenings, when the rush would be more. Sreenu agreed to go and help. Why she did not inform him before going to her grandparents. Now the holidays were finished and she had not come back to the clinic. Now, grandfather asked his other grandson to help in the clinic, Sreenu showed him the work and left. I asked him to check with Sneha's parents. Sreenu went to Sneha's house to enquire about her. Her mother closed door on his face saying she has not come back. Now I am in two minds, if she does not return, there is no use going back to Vijayawada.

Sneha

Kumar went away to Bombay. Now I have only a clinic for my time pass. Also, I wait for him to call, I wait on the telephone. One day by mistake I talked about eating non-veg with my mother. My mother caught my word and told my father about my eating non-veg. Father asked the mother if I had non-veg, what else could I have done? Mother asked me you said they are brahmins, how come they are having non-veg. They made a big issue of this and send me to my

grandparents' place. When degree colleges started they got my admission there and told me not to come to Vijayawada until I finish my degree. I don't have any way of informing Kumar. What would he think of me? He did not give me his number or address in Bombay. We never thought this day would come. I don't have any other option than to let it go.

Sreenu

Kumar rang me up and asked to check about Sneha. It seems she has not returned from their village. I went to the clinic and waited outside for Sneha's sister to come out, so I can confirm her details. She said she got admission to college there and she would not be coming home until the completion of her degree. I informed Kumar and said he better join college there.

Kumar

Now I am stuck in two minds if I join the college in Bombay, I may never see Sneha again. Finally, I decided to join in degree college in Hyderabad. It would be easy to reach Sneha when the time came. She would be 18 years of age in a year. I would need to wait until then. My mother's cousin is already studying in Hyderabad in the 2nd year Inter. I joined in degree and planned to live with him. His father had started a branch in Hyderabad. They had rented a house and used it as an office and ground floor flat as a godown. The owners of the house are pahilwans. They have an akada, where they practice wrestling. I thought we could go there and do some exercises with them. We will help in the branch and I can live free there. I have thought it unwise to go to Vijayawada, for Sneha's family would not like to see me there. Here I would have some work and do my studies. All I need to attend to the orders of the clients in my free time. Get a person to deliver goods to the shops. For the expenses, we can use the money from collections. This way I have gone through the first year.

Chapter 2

The year 1982 month of May

Kumar

For the summer holidays, my uncle went to his home first, leaving me to look after the office and deliveries. He came back after 1 month. Then he said I can go to my home in Bombay. Instead of going to Bombay, I went to Vijayawada. Instead of staying with my grandfather, I went and stayed with my grandfather's brother, I don't want Sneha's parents to see me at home. I went and met Sreenu and enquired if he got any news of Sneha. He said he knew where she is studying. I told him in two months is her birthday and she would be 18 then. Her father cannot do anything if we meet her. He said yes. I said be ready, we will think of something by then. I planned to elope with her. First, I asked my father to call my grandfather to Bombay for spending some time. I said he could not take the pressure of the clinic. I put them in a Train to Bombay myself. After they went away to Bombay, I asked Sreenu to go meet Sneha and explain our plan. She should wait at the Nellore railway station and I will pick her up and take her to Hyderabad. After reaching Hyderabad we will plan what to do next. On the day we planned I went to Nellore Railway station took two tickets to Hyderabad and waited for Sneha. She came as the train was about to start. We both boarded the train. When the train stopped at Vijayawada, Sreenu and Pradip came and visited us at the station. I gave him Sneha's grandfather's number and asked him to call them and inform them that Sneha is with us. Tell them we are in Vijayawada. When the train started they went away.

Sreenu

Kumar took away Sneha to Hyderabad, he said he will go from there to Bombay. He asked me to call her grandparents. I called the number she gave and informed them that Sneha is in Vijayawada, don't worry about her. I cut the phone when they started to ask questions on the phone. When Sneha's parents got to know about this they came to our shop to enquire about what happened to Sneha. I said I don't know where they are staying, all I know is that they came to Vijayawada. They did not believe me but shouted at my brother, my brother said he will look into the matter to cool them and send them away. I explained the whole situation to him. They will be marrying in two days, I will be going to Hyderabad. You can explain to them when they next visit you. My brother said if they are going to be married we should help them, I will handle the situation

here. I caught the next train and landed in Hyderabad. His uncle had made all the arrangements for their marriage. His uncle's father has permitted them to stay in their house cum office if he promises to look after the business. They both agreed to help in the business. Sneha might need to take a break from her studies. She has got to shift her college to Hyderabad, which may take some time.

Kumar

With a few people, we got married in a Temple. We decided to postpone our first night until everything cooled down. Until her parents accept our marriage, we should wait, that is Sneha's idea. For the time being Sneha would look after the office and I will get the deliveries done. We have planned to run the office together. Uncle is not interested in the business. He is in his own world. He wants his daily allowance and his fags and drinks. He plays TT, Cricket. He practices the guitar and other things. For the time being Sneha will be sleeping in my room and I would be sleeping in my uncle's room.

Sneha

I am on cloud nine. I didn't think Kumar would take the hard decisions that would affect our lives. He planned to get me away from the grandparents, he got us married. He agreed to my suggestion to wait until our parents have agreed to our marriage. Why they should make a big issue of my eating non-veg. Once I have eaten, I could not take it back. Nowadays everybody eats non-veg, those vegetarians also go to hotels to eat non-veg. They made a big issue out of it, now I will eat daily, I will see what they will do. Now I have some work to do at home. I would not be sitting idle at home. I have to prepare food and in my free time would be attending telephones, taking orders. Until now the orders are taken by the office at Vijayawada. Now they informed the sellers to order directly from Hyderabad. I can check the stock and can inform them when the deliveries can be made. The work has become easier for us. We were told to use whatever money we need for running the household but keep account of the expenses. No problem, we will not starve here. I need to wait until I can transfer my college to Hyderabad. There will be a slight break in my studies. But no problem, I can bear anything for being with Kumar. He is the ultimate aim in my life. When my father took me away to my grandparent's house, I thought I lost Kumar, now he is with me for twenty-four hours. I can hug him whenever I like. Nobody is there to object. I will call mummy and inform her of our marriage and ask for their blessings.

After consulting with Kumar, I called my mother and explained the situation. Asked her to accept our marriage and bless us. She said she will speak with my father and arrange for their visit.

But instead of mother and father arriving, grandfather sent his men to collect me and bring me to Vijayawada. He was hurt that I was taken from their care, and when mother gave them the information, he sent his men. At the time Kumar's uncle was not there. They beat up Kumar mercilessly. I shouted for help and owners from the opposite building came and rescued us. They prevented the men from taking me away. As they were pahilwans they have some influence in the local police station, they helped us. Kumar was taken to hospital. He was admitted with broken ribs. Which would take some time to heal. His parents were informed. His grandfather said he will come to stay with us for some time. Kumar has done a good thing to send them away to Bombay. The owners said they will keep an eye on our flat. When instead of giving their blessings, they have sent goons to attack us, I lost faith in the parents will ever forgive us.

If not our parents at least Kumar's Parents are on our side. They are very understanding. They did not scold him for marrying without telling them, instead, they promised to support us in whatever way.

Kumar

I didn't think Sneha's parents would go to the extent of killing me to take revenge for eloping with Sneha. They would have killed me if the owner's family had not come in time to rescue me. I had some broken ribs. I will be in pain for some time, I can bear everything to be with Sneha. At least now they will not try this again. They have been warned by the house owners, if they see any of them here again, they will send their dead bodies back. That should stop them from coming again. I think we have to forget getting blessings from Sneha's parents. At least my parents do not oppose our marriage. They have always supported us. The only thing they were worried about is about getting married at a young age. We promised them we will not burden them and us by having kids at this age. We want to complete our studies and settle down before having kids. They said they will support us whenever we want to have kids, they would like to see their grandkids.

I spoke with the house owners about opening a clinic. They said they will provide a place beside the akada. I called my father at home and spoke about grandfather opening a clinic in Hyderabad. He spoke to grandfather and said he

agreed to open a clinic here. I asked house owners to send some people to collect grandfather's house and clinic items. I don't want grandfather to go again there. They brought the items and set up a clinic. One fine day grandfather came from Bombay and we opened the clinic.

Sneha

Kumar doesn't seem to have recovered fully from the attack. He sent someone to get a household and clinic furniture and other things. Now the clinic is open. We both will be helping in the clinic. I spoke with his grandmother about setting a date for our first night. I told her we would be careful about kids. We will want to wait four or five years before thinking about kids. As my parents refused to entertain our claim, we decided not to wait for them to bless us or forgive us. Grandmother consulted pandit and fixed a date for our first night. She informed Kumar's parents about this. His mother wanted to come but could not make it on short notice. Grandmother performed the required ceremony and send us to our room. I have to hand over coconuts to married women, that is the ceremony. They called it garbadhan. It is a kind of fertility ceremony. We had our first night then and there. It was a wonderful experience for us. The day I waiting for the last three years came. He took me in his hands and we hugged to our heart's content. He took away the jewellery I am wearing one by one, and for each jewellery piece he removed, he kissed me at a different place. That way he covered me with kisses from top to bottom. First, he removed the silk saree I was wearing. I don't normally wear sarees and over that silk sarees were heavy. He removed the first burden I had. It seems like he can read my mind. Then he removed the blouse buttons and freed my breasts from the cover of my blouse. He looked at them which seem round and hard. He touched my nipples and they hardened from his touch. Now he completely removed the blouse and kissed on my breasts one by one. I moaned from the pleasure. He kept me on my pleasure all the way. Next, he removed the petticoat by loosening the knots and pulling it down. Then he kissed on my cunt area. A pleasure rose to my heart and head. I felt like I was on clouds and he parted my thighs and put his tongue on my vagina and moved around. I think I had an organism then. I felt like something is escaping my vagina. At first, I thought I had urinated but the pleasure told me differently. It was as if I was having multiple organisms until he finished. He rolled aside and lay on the bed face up. I put my hand on his chest and he looked at me lovingly and said I think I could have done better. I said it was more than I expected, where did you learn all this, he said he did not learn anything, it must be natural. We slept in each other arms.

Now as grandfather also came here to stay, house owners have got the next portion vacated and gave it to us. Now, grandfather and uncle were staying in the other flat. Our flat we were using for our bedroom and office room and part godown. As we were getting more materials, our ground floor godown was filled to capacity. If our sales increase this way we might have to think about having another godown. Our combined efforts have paid off and we improved business tremendously. The customers were saying about Kumar at such a small age you have achieved a lot. You are a very good businessman. You will come up in life. He has proved his mettle. His interest in fulfilling business needs has tremendously improved business. In six months, we have more than doubled sales and our profitability has more than doubled. The only thing lacking is we are not getting any fixed salary, we are getting only our expenses money. This way we can't build our future. But it is a stepping stone. This way at least we can finish our studies. I got my college transferred here but had to miss some classes. I can concentrate on work and studies. Grandfather's clinic picked up quickly. Sometimes he needed us both to help at the clinic. We are allocating timing accordingly. Ours is not a shop, where someone has to be present every day. All we need is to pick up the phone, take orders, or give information. We got a phone line drawn to the clinic so that we can pick up the phone in the clinic too. Also, patients can call in an emergency.

This way we thought we are settled for life. But life has its way of bringing surprises.

Chapter 3

The year 1983 month of January

Kumar

It was a cold day. There were Bhogi fires on every street. People set up fires to celebrate Pongal, Bhogi. Some people bring their old wooden furniture to put on fire. It was festivities everywhere.

Out of nowhere a jeep full of people came and stopped in the centre of the road near a bonfire. Several people got down from the jeep with swords in their hands. They went inside the akada and they slashed the throat of the family head and ran away in their vehicle. By the time anyone reacted, he was dead. While they were going away, grandfather had come there to see what is the commotion. They pushed him aside and went away. He was not seriously injured but had some discomfort. They went to the police station and registered a case. When they enquired, they could not determine who has done the act. It seems the gang came from the north. Who has bought the gang members, could not be determined. After the completion of rituals, they sat down elected an elder as head of the family. They arranged for a meeting to take revenge on the murderers. First, they had to find who had sent the gang to murder their head. They check listed their enemies, who would try to do such a thing.

The pahilwans new head had sent his men to check with their rivals to find out who had the guts to do such a thing. Others had denied any knowledge of the incident or who could have done it. Now, this thing has escalated and someone hit someone during the verification. It has reached their heads and someone had sent some people and the total thing escalated into a gang war.

We did not want to be in the middle of this gang war and decided to go to Bombay. We booked tickets on the bus and went over to Bombay to our parent's house. Grandfather and grandmother went to Vijayawada to visit his brother. Now our parents have not met Sneha before. They welcomed us with all the required rituals. My mother saw Sneha, held her face in between her hands and said to me you had bought me a beautiful daughter in law.

I took Sneha for visits to various places. Once we went to Juhu Beach, other days we went to Church gate from there we went to Marine drive. I took her by walk to the Cuffe Parade. From there we caught a taxi and came back. One day we went to VT station, from there we went to Gateway of India, from outside we watched Taj Mahal hotel. From there we went to Elephanta caves by boat

and back. So, this way we spent 15 days. We called Hyderabad and found the situation cooled down and we returned to Hyderabad and grandfather was already back. From the time of the Head's murder, grandfather was having some back discomfort. He said he could no longer see so many patients and he wanted to retire. The head advised Sneha to go for RMP registration, he will help her to get the registration. She can look after the patients officially and our grandfather can supervise. This way grandfather would reduce workload. Sneha agreed to it and filled out the forms for registration. The head used his influence and got Sneha the registration. Now she can officially help grandfather and can look at patients on her own.

We went for the summer holidays to Bombay, this time grandfather decided to stay in Hyderabad. Uncle would be looking after the business. My mother was asking Sneha when are you giving me a grandchild, she said shyly we are waiting for Kumar's studies to be completed. Mother said don't mind about his studies, we heard stories of people waiting and never having children of their own. Sneha said we are only 19, please wait for some time. Mother said ok, it is your wish and went away. I said to Sneha don't mind her, parents are like that only, she said yes.

Sneha

We have been to Bombay for the summer holidays. This is the second time we have been to Bombay. The last time we came here, we had spent all the time visiting various places. Now it is summer, it is not as hot as Hyderabad, but hot enough to go out. In the evenings we can go to Beach. We went to Juhu beach in the evening. From there we went to Hare Rama Hare Krishna Mandir near the beach.

We spent one month in Bombay and returned to Hyderabad. As Grandfather is having some problems looking after the clinic.

Kumar

My college has started, this is being final year degree, I started taking studies seriously. I avoided going to the clinic altogether. Only concentrating on studies and business. As Sneha also working as a Registered medical practitioner, we are getting ourselves some money. The arrangement with the grandfather's brother only taking expenses money is still valid, we are using that for the expenses only and saving her income aside.

Chapter 4

The year 1984 month of April

Kumar

Without any further incident, I have completed my degree. We have to decide what to do next. We can't forever look after the business without taking any remuneration. I started looking for jobs in Hyderabad. I have applied for all the ads I saw in the newspapers. I went to all the companies suggested by known persons. Even though I have experience in running the business, no one is ready to take that as experience. Even completing my degree does not have any improvement in my chances of getting a job. I always thought where all these jobs are disappearing. We have been constricted by the no salary, only expenses policy of grandfather. My grandfather strictly follows this policy. Income from the clinic, he uses for the follow-up with the lawyers. We know there is no use to pour money into this land, which we may never see. He could not get that into his mind.

I thought I will go to Bombay and try for a job there. I left the business to my uncle and we both went to Bombay. Sneha could get a job with a local doctor as a nurse, her RMP certificate came into use there. She can issue medical certificates to the needy on her own. Most employees come for these certificates to be submitted to their employers.

I have been searching through newspaper ads for a suitable job, but a suitable job eluded me. One day I was going to Borivali for a job interview, it was a journey of around 30 minutes. The local train was almost empty. I sat near the window and read a book. At Andheri, a guy around my age got in and sat beside me. He struck a conversation with me. He was talking in Hindi and I was answering in English. He asked me where are you going? I said Borivali. He asked why are you going there? I said for an interview. He asked me what have you studied? I said I am a B Com graduate. He asked do you know accounts. I said my specialization is accounting. Do you have any experience? I said I had looked after my grandfather's business for 3 years. What kind of business, taking orders, delivering goods, checking the stocks and replenishing the stocks, maintain accounts. He said We have a factory in Bhandup where we manufacture Packing Tins, do you want to work with us? I asked what kind of work? Same as you have done before. Take orders, deliver the goods to the customers in our vans. Maintain accounts, things like that. I said like clerical work. He said you can say that. I asked what will you pay? We will start with

rupees 500. If we like your work we will give an increase according to your work. I said ok. He said come with me, I am going to Borivali to meet a client. Let me see how you handle clients. He said the client has some problem with the delivery. We have to sort out the problem. I said let us see. We both went to the client. He said we have delivered the tins in the wrong dimensions than ordered. Because the tins are preprinted, we can't take them back, it will be useless for us. The quantity it fills does not change, the height has decreased and the width has increased. So, it looks fatter than the original. It was the mistake of the factory workers, who has placed the wrong dice. I managed to convince the customer to use the tins ordered and offer it as a new packing for a new look or something. He should promote this packing with some kind of offering with it, which should increase his sales. Try this if this trick fails we will return the money you have paid for the order. My new boss was just listening without interrupting me. The customer said we will offer a small packet of our new product as a sample. If the sales have not improved you have to pay for the order. I said if you are offering a sample you are killing two birds with one stone. Don't worry if your sample is good enough, your sales for both the products will increase. We have convinced the client and come out. My new boss said I am Kirit Trivedi. I am the manager of the factory. My father owns the factory. You are welcome to work with us. I will give you an assistant manager post. You can work under me. I said thanks. From there he has taken me to his factory. We got down at Bhandup station and waited for the bus. When the bus came we got in and he showed me the bus stop to get down. He took me to his father's cabin and told me to wait outside. He went inside and spoke to his father. He was telling him I have seen him work, he convinced the client who wants to return the whole lot of tins, which we had to throw away in the junk. I offered him an Assistant manager job instead of a clerk which I offered him first. He will be an asset to us. His father said ok, what salary you offered him, first I offered 500 for the clerk but you say what we should offer for Asst. manager. He said let us offer him 800. Let us see how he works. Kirit came out and took me to his father and introduced me. His father said we will offer you 800 for the assistant manager job. I said thanks and we both came out. He has taken me to show around the factory. There are two levels of the factory. Everywhere machinery for cutting and fitting was placed. There were workers from many different places, some were Maharashtrians and some are from UP and Bihar. After completing the tour, he has taken me to his cabin, which is next to his father's cabin. He said he will provide me with a table and chair. We have to work from here. He showed me a phone, this number is different from the father's cabin. We take orders from the clients here. If we don't lift then they will ring father's

number. If you are here don't miss the call. I said ok. He called some workers and asked to bring a table and chair from the first floor. They brought and arranged the table and chair. He showed me the files of customers. Each customer's file contains the dimensions of the orders and the branding to be printed on them. There are stacks of the pre-printed sheets for each brand. According to the order, they will take up cutting of the sheets, which are perpendicular in shape. And for top and bottom, circular pieces will be cut from either preprinted or blank sheets. These will be attached on separate machines. I tried to absorb all this information. Then he showed me accounts and each customer's outstanding. They give credit limits based on the customers. From some customers they take advance payment, some big customers they give credit from one week to one month.

We went down, our offices were on a kind of mezzanine floor. There was a van being loaded with packs of tins. When they are packed he gave me a delivery challan and said to take it to Godrej, Vikhroli. I went with the van, supervised the unloading and delivery of the tins. Took the signatures from the supervisor there and came back to the factory. Prepared the invoice from the delivery challan, kept it for delivery. When the telephone rang I lifted the receiver and he said his company name, I noted the name, took his order on a notepad and passed it to Kirit. He took it and prepared orders for each item and passed it onto the floor. This way I finished my first day. On the way back, Kirit dropped me at the bus stop near the station. From there I caught a bus to Santacruz and reached home.

Sneha

Kumar came home very happy, he said he got an Assistant Manager job with a manufacturing unit. At last, we are away from my parents, as long as I was in Hyderabad, I was fearing for the life of Kumar. They may not do anything to me, but I don't know what they would do with Kumar. Now they may not come this far. The colony has security and they will not let anyone in the night. In the daytime also, they verify the identity of unknown persons before letting them enter the colony. I feel secure here. We don't have a big home here, we had to share our room with others. We don't have any privacy here, but we try to avoid these problems, so we don't have much trouble. Kumar's father got a wooden partition from someone who was trying to discard it. He got it installed in the front room. We have a small room for ourselves. We don't have a cot but we had two small mattresses which we combine and put on the floor and slept together. In the daytime, we roll them to put them aside. This way we started

our new life. My RMP certification came for good use. I am working for a small clinic doctor. I get a monthly salary, sometimes patients come with a request for medical certificates, I got some of them printed and fill the details and signed and put my RMP rubber stamp and it is valid for getting leaves and other purposes for them. They used to pay from Rs.10 to Rs.50 for a certificate based on the number of days. That is the extra income for us. We were happy with the present situation. Sometimes, mommy, it is what I call my mother-in-law asks about children but I say we have lots of time ahead, let us settle down first.

Kumar

I have got a job as an Assistant Manager with the manufacturing company, but it is a tough job, I have to look after everything from loading, delivery, getting the signatures and preparing invoices and getting them delivered. Where payments are concerned I had to check the outstandings, whenever the payments are due had to go to the companies and remind them. This is hectic work. Move around the city a lot. Most of our work is spread around suburbs. But Bombay suburbs are very stretched. I have to deliver from Borivali to Bandra and Thane to Kurla.

My work has been very hectic and I couldn't give much time to Sneha. She is also busy with her nursing work. At least we could sit in the night and talk after dad put up a partition in our room. We will not be disturbed by the people going to the bathroom at the night. We can cosy up with each other and sit or sleep. I am just 21 and we have a full life ahead of us our priority at this time is to settle down and possibly have a house of our own, which is very difficult in a city like Bombay.

One day I asked Kirit when did you set up this factory. He said we have purchased this factory from the previous owner. Total premises and machinery with workers we got at a cheap rate. He had some problem and he sold it to us. we are running this for the last two years. He has given us his old customers also. I asked what have you studied? He said I had done GCD after doing SSC from Baroda and after that, I have done 12th and now doing 2nd year B Com. You have to help me a little with my studies. I said Ok.

I went for delivery with the van, it took us to Vakola, behind Church. By the time we reached the factory, they were having lunchtime. As it would take another half an hour, I thought I would go home and have lunch, Sneha would also be home. I took the parallel road to the main road and started walking towards the house. After I walked half the way, a girl was coming from the opposite direction, when I looked at her I thought I saw her somewhere. She smiled at

me when I looked at her and I smiled back, thinking where I had seen her. She was holding some books in her hand. I went home and returned to the factory where we had to supply the packing tins. I was walking on the same backroad; the same girl came walking opposite side. When I reached her, I stopped and asked her do you know me? She said don't you remember? Last year when I was walking in the colony, I had sprained my leg, I was about to fall, you had caught me and helped me reach my destination. I said yes, I remember, you went to D block, yes? Yes, I was going to Uday's home, you know him, right? I said I have been here only a few months, I was staying in Hyderabad and came over here only recently. If you had been staying in Hyderabad, how come you helped me last year. I said my family stays here, I was studying in Hyderabad. She asked what did you study? I said I am a B Com graduate. She said I am also. By the way, I am Sahithi. I said I am Kumar. I looked at the time and said ok, bye I am getting delayed. She said where are you going in a hurry? I said I came here to deliver tins at the paint company, I work at tins manufacturing company in Bhandup. Where do you stay? I said in the colony our building is behind the D Block. She said ok bye, and went away. I thought these Bombay girls are very friendly and went to the factory to deliver.

I went back to the factory, Kirit asked me exams are coming near, will you come and teach me in the night? I said I have my wife waiting at home, I can't help you at night. He asked are you married? You are so young. I said there is a story behind it, I will tell some other time. He said we don't have any urgent work now, please tell me your story. I told him how Sneha and I loved each other. How when I came here for the holidays, how her parents took her to her grandparents' place and left her there. How I could not find her and joined the college in Hyderabad? How I waited for her to become a major and how I eloped with her and brought her to Hyderabad and what happened later. How we came to Bombay to find suitable work. All this story took more than an hour. When I finished the story, he said wow! What a story I could make a film out of this. I told him we stay with our parents, I want to make something of myself, stand on my feet, to show my wife what kind of a man I am. He said bravo, you are a brave man.

It was Sunday and Suri, is the name of the boy on the ground floor asked me to come to play cricket. Our building is at the dead end, they put the stumps on the road and we started playing. At the time of the break, I asked him who is Uday? He showed a short man, he is Maharashtrian and said he is Uday, he stays in the D block beside Sandeep, showing another boy. What happened? I said nothing.

When the match finished we all sat at the stairs of the small house opposite our building, its old tiled house and its entrance on the other side. I went to Uday and asked him do you know Sahithi? He said yes, she is my cousin, what happened? Nothing, I helped her when she sprained her leg I said. He said it was last year, it was you that helped her. She was telling me about you. He seemed to have a good impression of me after I asked about Sahithi.

I saw Sneha coming, I said my wife is coming and went to her and we both went together to our home. He was asking Suri something. later Suri told me he was asking him about my marriage.

After two days I came to the paints company at Vakola for delivery. We have handed over the material and the man with the van went to the security for getting signatures. I came out and there is a paan shop close by, I went there asked him for a fag. He gave me one I lit it and stood there and smoking. I heard a voice from behind me and turned it is Sahithi, she asked accusingly do you smoke? I said once in a while, I had some free time. I heard from Uday that you were married. I said, yes, it is a big story, you would not have time for that. She said tell me in brief. I said we were friends in junior college and when I came here for holidays, her parents sent her away. So, when she attained majority I eloped with her and married her. Her parents had created some problems, we stood against all the odds. After completing my degree, I brought her here. She is working with the doctor at the market. She asked what is her name? I said Sneha. She said 'S, S' referring to her and Sneha's first letters of names. I did not say anything. My fag finished, I threw on the road and snubbed it. She said sorry, I did not let you smoke, I said no problem, I don't smoke much. She went away. Now she also knows I am married, I thought. But she is talking to me as a close acquaintance. Like we have been friends for a long time, why?

Why did Kirit in the first meeting offer me a job in his factory? What did he see in me? In the meantime, the van came and stopped beside me. I got in he drove on to the factory. When I reached the factory, Kirit asked me to explain the accounts to him. we both sat down and I explained the problems to him. we sat and studied for 3 hours. After finishing the tuition, I sat and took up outstanding. I took all the overdue and called the clients one by one asking for payments. It took me one hour to call all the customers.

After a week Kirit asked me to collect the cheque from the paint company when I go for delivery. I went with the van for delivery. When the tins were unloaded I went inside the office and went to meet the branch accountant for the cheque. When I entered I felt a déjà vu, I had been there before. I have been coming to

Bombay for five years but never entered the office. All this time I delivered the tins I never went inside. I kept looking around like I knew the people there. I went and collected the cheque and came out.

Another day I went to the paint company I was delayed there. It was after 7:30 pm and I said I will not return to the factory and will go home. I started walking towards home in the back alley. When I reached a colony gate, I saw Sahithi coming out from the gate with a girl she was little fat and she wore shabby clothes and looked like Maharashtrian. She looked at me and said hi Kumar, I said hi Sahithi. I looked at the girl with her, Sahithi said this is Bharathi she is the instructor at the typing institute. I said so, you are coming from typing. She said yes, I am learning typing and shorthand. I asked what is shorthand? She said to take dictation we use it. I nodded my head as if I understood her and I don't have a clue what is dictation. I started walking with them. She was talking and asking me questions. She asked me how is your wife is. I said she is doing fine. I think I saw your wife at the doctor's, at the clinic beside the bakery, right? She was wearing a Punjabi dress and not so fair and medium height, isn't she? I said right. She said to Bharathi he eloped with her when her parents objected. He is married for the last three years. She looked at me as if I married so young. I did not say anything. By walking we reached her house. Then I realized that I walked with them all the way to her house. I said bye, see you and turned back to go to my house. I thought she is very easy to talk to. I don't talk with girls much. Even with Sneha, I don't talk that much. How Sahithi is making me talk? There is something with her, I talk everything with her with ease.

Sneha

Kumar has become very busy. He is coming very late to the home. Sometimes he used to sleep in the factory when he misses the last bus. It was difficult to sleep without him, but I had to be considerate of him, who is working so hard for our future. He gives a small amount for household expenses and saves the rest in his bank account. He talks about buying a house. I know it is very costly here. But he is trying.

Chapter 5

1985 month of Jan

Kumar

I have started the new year on a resolution, to buy a house as soon as possible. I have been working day and night. I am getting paid for my efforts. Kirit does not hold back while paying overtime. We have increased sales during the last six months. I have channelled the deliveries. I rotate the deliveries by their total orders. Those who give most orders would get the deliveries first. This way they would order more in anticipation of regular supply and their supplies are not affected. It's just the opposite of a vicious cycle I think it's called the virtuous circle.

One evening we took delivery to Godrej at Vikhroli. There was a long line of pending deliveries. There must be some problem with the deliveries, we put our van in the line and waiting for our turn. I got down and went to the paan shop outside the gate. I got a fag and was smoking, I saw Sahithi coming towards me. I did not believe myself. She was totally transformed. She had cut her hair short. She was wearing conservative dresses, now she is wearing a modern dress. Her demeanour also changed. She came to me and asked here also you have reached? I said very seriously, my only work is to make rounds of you. She looked stunned by my words. I laughed and said you only can make jokes, I can also make. She laughed and said I was scared for a minute that I said something wrong. I asked what happened to you, you have transformed into a butterfly from a pupa. She said what an analogue, I have got a job here, my sister has recommended me. It is her idea to be like this. What are you doing here? I said I am waiting for making the delivery, see the line today, what happened? She said some problem with the worker's complaints, it should be clear by tomorrow. She stood there and was talking and when I saw the time it was 8:30 pm. I told her sorry, because of me you got delayed. She said no problem, when I am speaking with you I forget time, ok bye. I said wait I will drop you at the station. I told the van driver I will return in half an hour took an auto and dropped her at the station and came back.

Sneha

Kumar's life has become very hectic. I don't know if he will come home, or not. Father in law got a phone installed at home by the department. If Kumar is not coming, he would ring up and say he was staying there for the night. He said

they have arranged a sofa in his room, he would sleep there at the night. It has become very difficult when he does not come home. But he has a dream of owning a house. I bear all these troubles because of his dream. How long it will take for him? Today he was struck at Godrej, they have a long line and he is waiting in the line. He does not even know how long he will be there. Then when will he come back? I am missing him. He comes home tired and we only have sex irregularly, now I can't have the comfort of his closeness. Shall I have a sleepless night today also?

Kirit

Sometimes I feel sorry for Kumar. He sleeps here in the night if he is delayed. I have one more year before I complete my degree, then I can look after the work myself and he can breathe some relief. I have dumped my total work on him and he handled that very efficiently. I never thought someone can do my work better than me. He has proved himself. I have not made a mistake by offering him the job. If not for him I would not be able to study as I am doing now. Over that, he also teaches me whenever required. Even if I miss some classes I know I can depend on him for teaching the subjects for me. Above all he teaches in English, it is an added advantage, I can write the exams, what he had taught me.

I should ask father to give him an increment. I will try to get him that increment by the new financial year. He deserves every rupee he earns.

Kumar

I returned to the factory around 11:30 am after delivery. There were some men and women were sitting outside the office. The workers must have placed some chairs and benches outside the cabins. I looked at them and went into my office, mine means mine and Kirit. He was not there, he must be with his father. It seems some interviews must be going on. I don't need to worry, I know my place is solid here. But somewhere in the corner, there was little concern. I thought I should have a look at what post they are taking the interviews. I took an important document and went into the room after knocking. Kirit's father and our neighbour factory owner were sitting behind the desk. Our neighbour was sitting in the main seat. Seeing that I thought it was not for us but for our neighbour's offices they are doing the interviews. I mentally heaved a sigh of relief. I said to Kirit's father shall I trouble you for a signature, sir. He took the document, looked at it and signed it gave it back. I came out and looked at the waiting people. I selected one girl seating at the end of the bench and went to her and asked her, what have you come here for? She said we came for Sales

Executive interviews, I did not know it was in a factory, otherwise, I would not have come. I said I don't think it was for our factory, our neighbour has a godown here, he has an office in an upmarket area, he must be conducting the interviews. She said thanks for the information, I was thinking of leaving. I have waited this long because I came all this way, I wanted to see what they are offering. One of my friends sent me, these people took his company's dealership, he wanted to see how they are selling his goods, so he sent me to check on them. I asked so you are like a spy? She said nothing like that, he wanted to know if they are promoting our goods or not. I said ok, I am Kumar, I am Assistant manager here, nice seeing you. She said bye, I am Mahira Sheikh. I looked at her thinking she is a Muslim and went to my room. After around 20 minutes, she knocked on the door and opening a little and put her head inside and said excuse me. I got up and said what can I do for you? She asked can you tell me where are the toilets. I thought for a second, the public toilets here are very unclean, can she go there? I said I will show her our toilets, I took the toilet key and told her to follow me. I took her to the ground floor, from there from the stairs from behind I took her to the first floor, there are our executive toilets. I opened the lock and told her you can use them. I waited for her to come back and locked the door and asked her to follow me. We came back down and up the stairs for the mezzanine floor. She went and sat on a chair there. I went to my cabin and sat down.

I heard a knock on the door and I looked up and Mahira was looking through the door again, I said come in. She came and sat down on the chair. I said how the interview went. She said ok. She said you said your name is Kumar? I said yes. She asked what kind of work you do? I said I look after all the things in this office. She asked what things? I take orders, I give the order to workers to complete, I get the deliveries done, I prepare delivery challans, invoices and send them to customers. I prepare accounts, I make collections. I am A to Z person here. How much salary do you get here? I said Rs.1500 plus overtime.

She talked this and that and said bye and went away.

Kirit's second-year exams will be starting next week. He asked me to teach each subject. Most of my time is spent teaching him. Other works have taken a back seat. He would send someone else for deliveries. It has taken two weeks for the completion of his exams. Kirit gave me Rs.1000/- from his pocket for teaching. He said thanks to you I could write exams peacefully. I said don't mention. As exams were complete, he was attending office full time. So, I got a breather and I could reach home on time. Now I see a smile on Sneha's face. My birthday came I have officially completed 21 years and entered 22.

After a week Mahira came to our cabin, I introduced her to Kirit. He said glad to meet you and she said glad to meet you too. I said he is the manager and the son of the owner. Kirit said he is expecting his results next week. She asked what exams? He said second-year B com results. She said second-year B Com. How come you are here? I asked her. She said I came to collect samples from the godown. I said if you have any free samples give me some. She said ok. I asked her where do you stay. She said at IC Colony. Where? I asked. Near Andheri. I said ok. Kirit said You live at IC Colony and turned to me he said, it is where the Andheri road reaches Western Express Highway. I said oh, ok. Mahira said to Kirit so you know where it is. He said we stay at Andheri East, daily we pass that colony. I think I know someone from the colony, Joseph D'Souza. She said Oh Joseph uncle stays in the next building to us. they both were talking and I went back to my work and listened to their chatting. It seems she is a talkative lady, that is why she must have chosen marketing. She was asking him how are you marketing his tins. He said we had clients previously and we are doing with them. She told him they should market them. He said we can't manage existing business, why they should market products. We have pending work for at least a week. She said then you should go for production enhancement. I was just listening to their chat. This went on for another half an hour. It seems she is trying to get information from Kirit than just chatting. I spoke in between them disturbing their chatting, what are the samples you are expecting to collect. She said I don't know. So, what are the items you are supposed to sell? I have to see what they are giving as samples. It seems she is more interested in our work than revealing what her company is offering. Or there is something sinister in her visit. I stopped my work and kept looking at them, whoever is talking, concentrating on her words. trying to get to her inner meaning on her words. Looking at his time Kirit got up and said to me I am going home. She asked how are you going? He said by two-wheeler. Can you give me a lift? She asked. He asked do you have a big parcel? She said no, only a small parcel and showed him a small package the size of a shoebox. He said ok, let us go. I thought she was pulling him into her net.

Kirit

Mahira is talking so sweet. She has the gift of the gab. She was giving me points on how to market our potential. How we can get bigger clients and can leave small customers behind. Is it advisable? I dropped her at the gate of the colony and went home. On the way home, I was thinking about Mahira, she is good looking, not very beautiful, dresses modern, carries herself well. She was asking

for a lift, is it for convenience, or does she want to come close? Kumar seems to know her, I have to ask him.

The next day I asked Kumar, what is his opinion of Mahira? He said I can't place her. She seems to be over-friendly. What are her intentions, I have no clue? When she sat outside for the interview just asked her what interview you have come for. Later she came and sat here asking lots of questions. She is more interested in our business rather than theirs. I said yes, I have seen her giving unsolicited advice on our marketing strategies. She has told us we should discard small businesses and concentrate on big businesses. I know small businesses are also important. We are delaying their deliveries where ever possible. But we can't altogether stop their business, they may go to another manufacturer then big customers will be pulled by them. It is not advisable. We have to retain whatever clients we have.

Kumar agreed with my views. We can't let any customer go away. If any customer goes to our competitor, he will offer them discounts and other offers and pull them, then he will show this as an advantage pull others. With capacity usage, he can offer them discounts in the beginning then slowly increase the prices. This is a very dangerous area of business. I said marketing people may not know the nuisances of business, ultimately their goal is only to sell. He said that is true, we should think twice when we receive advice if it is feasible to our business needs or will go against our business ethics. She could be from our competitor, she might be trying to get our small customers first and then will pull bigger customers. There is a chance of that also. Otherwise, why would she come and speak to us? We are just guys without any power to decide on these matters.

Now what he said started my train of thoughts. Is she from a competitor? If so what is her ultimate goal? To ruin our business? Or is it some other motive to purchase our factory? If we start to lose customers we will be forced to sell our factory, they can purchase our factory and they can expand the business, they should be having lots of money to invest. I heard lots of investors with huge money do such kinds of things. Is she one of their agents? I expressed my concerns to Kumar, he agreed that could be one possibility. I thought we should be careful about these kinds of people. I will check with my uncle what kind of person she is?

I went to the owner of the godown, he is also Gujarati and he is a friend of my father, I call him uncle. I asked him who is this Mahira Shaikh? He looked at the interview call letters and biodatas and said they have not employed her. She

was working for a marketing firm, that is all there in her bio-data. I said ok and came back and told Kumar about this. He said to be careful with her. We don't have any idea about her.

After a few days, she came at the time of my going home. She said I came to a nearby office, I thought you would give me a lift. I thought be careful and said I will be slightly delayed, she said it's ok I will wait. she sat down on a chair and started chatting with Kumar. He is a good listener and also a good observer. I have already completed my work, for just to show off I picked a file and acted studying the file. I could not act for much longer and closed the file and said let us go to Mahira. On the way she asked do you eat non-veg? I said I eat sometimes Kumar brings for me, but my father does not know I eat. She said then come on Sunday to our house for lunch. I hesitated a little and finally said yes to her, to see what is her game.

I went to her house on Sunday. She gave me the address from that I searched the house. I know where Joseph uncle stays, so it became easier for me to find her house. She has a father who works in Air India, a mother who is a housewife a brother who works in the merchant navy, and a sister who also works in Air India. Her brother is of average height but her sister is tall, I had to look up to see her face. Their house is on the first floor. She introduced me to her parents and siblings. We all sat for lunch, His brother was asking about me. I said we run a factory in Bhandup. He asked how do you know my sister? I said she had come for an interview and returned to meet my colleague. Ok, he said. Then her sister asked me some questions about what kind of work we do? What I have studied. From where I am. Her father and mother seemed to be simple persons. They did not interfere in our chats. Completing his meal her father got up and went away. Her mother was serving. We finished our lunch and we got up. Her father and mother said they will visit some relatives nearby and went away. Then her sister removed a packet of cigarettes from somewhere gave each one a fag. We all smoked on the back balcony. I only smoke if I have company. After some time, I said I will be moving. Mahira said to drop me at the station. I said ok and we both went to the station. There is a restaurant before the station, she said to stop there. She got down and said I will introduce you to my friends, come. She took me inside, there were three guys were sitting at a table. She went and sat down and showed me a place to sit. She introduced me to them and she said pointing to a dusky man with a round face said he is Choudhary, and pointing to a white man he is Rakesh, and Pointing to another guy he is Salim. I said hi to everyone. I sat there listening to their talks. Choudhary was talking about planets and their effect on the coming days. Rakesh took out a rolled cigarette

from his top pocket lit it, and passed it on to Mahira, she took a drag and gave it to me, I refused to take it. She passed back to Rakesh. Salim took out a packet of cigarettes from his packet put one in his mouth pulled out one and put it in front of me, I took one and he lit mine and his with a lighter. I smoked and listened to their talks. After finishing my fag, I got up and said bye and went to my home.

The next day when I went to the office, I told Kumar the whole story of Mahira and her friends. He listened with apt attention. After listening to all this he went to his thoughts.

Kumar

Kirit told me about his visit to Mahira's house. From what he told me I could not make much about Mahira. But why she did ask him to lunch? What is her end game in this? What does she intend to achieve from all this? I could not make up my mind about her. I said the same to Kirit. I could not make anything from all this. You have to take a decision on your own based on circumstances. He agreed to this and said based on the time I had to make my decisions.

I said to him I want to go a little early today. I have been going home very late daily and I could not get my weekly off yesterday. He said to take a half-day and go home, I will look after the office.

I went to Vakola by bus, got down at the next stop to my regular stop at Market. I looked at the clinic where Sneha works, it was closed, which means she will be at home. So, hurried home. I knocked on the door, Sneha opened the door. When I came inside, she closed the door and asked did you have lunch? I said I had. I got a half-day off from working yesterday. She said good. I asked her shall we go somewhere? She asked where? I said somewhere like the beach. It's hot out here, the beach would be cool. She said let us go.

After a long time, we were together. We went and sat on the beach until it became dark. When it became dark we returned to our house.

Kirit

After two days Mahira came back to the factory. She said I am sorry for that day, I had a fight with Rakesh in the evening and I broke up with him. He was a bad influence.

I did not know what to say, so I kept calm. Kumar said it's not a problem. Don't worry about it. The next day she rang up in the evening and said to meet at the restaurant we met at on Sunday. I said I will be there by 6:30 she said ok.

I went to the hotel on the way home. She was sitting with Choudhary, Salim, and a new man. She introduced him as they are planning to manufacture small fire extinguishers and they need tin-based dischargers. Can you design it for them? I asked them what kind of discharge system they need? I have seen fire extinguishers, these need to be like them. He said something like that. But they don't need to be broken at the head to discharge, the technology will be different. We don't want to go to big firms for the sake of secrecy, we need to keep the details secret, people start imitating before these hit the market. I said we might have something like that. I will show you a sample and from that, we can build a design. They agreed that if you show us a sample we will give you an advance. I said ok and went to my house.

The next day she rang me up and asked are you ready with the sample? I said I am. She said before taking orders don't forget to get in advance. Without advance don't start the production. I said I will do that. I asked Kumar to accompany me for the sample display. We both went to the restaurant near Andheri. We have shown our sample and they said it has to be less in diameter and taller in size. We agreed and said if they give advance, we will prepare the sample according to their requirements. We can't take up this without advance as we have to procure preprinted tin sheets and prepare the cutting die has to be made as per diameter and height. He said to send someone tomorrow to our office to collect the cheque. I said Kumar will come and collect the cheque. He said it's ok.

We came out and I said to Kumar it is good that is he asking us to collect from his office, otherwise we will not know who we are dealing with. Mahira did a good thing by warning us to get advance before starting our work. I asked Kumar to go and collect the advance.

Kumar

I went to the company manufacturing fire extinguishers. Mahira has also come there and met me at the door. She took me inside and showed me the manufacturing process. At present they are manufacturing standard size extinguishers. They want to make small size mobile extinguishers. They can be fit in cabins and cars. He took me to the accounts department and they gave me the advance cheque. I took the cheque and put it in my pocket. She came out

with me and said I want to take up the dealership of this product. I said good, you are in sales so you can take up sales. She looked at me as if to ask for investing in this venture. As I have my own goals of saving for a house, I have not replied. She asked me will Kirit invest in the dealership? I said he does not do any investments on his own, his father only makes all the decisions. If you can approach his father, that would be better. I looked at her for her reaction. She has met his father on the day of the interview. She must have understood what kind of person he is, he will not invest without understanding the product. She must have thought it is useless to approach his father.

I went to the factory and explained in detail our conversation. He said you did a good thing saying about my father. If she did ask me I might have agreed to invest my own money. Now I will follow your lead and say what impression you had created with her.

Kirit

Kumar did me a big help by saying I can't invest without my father's advice. She did approach me the next day. I followed up on what Kumar told her. I told her I don't have any money of my own. I am not the own son of my father. I am adopted by them. My own mother and adopted mother are sisters. My adopted parents did not have any children. So, they adopted me. I don't have any money of my own. She seems to be convinced by the talks and went away disappointed.

Kumar

When Mahira told me about Kirit being the adopted son of the owner, I was quite surprised. First, I thought he might have told the story to her to get away from her. But when I asked him he confirmed the details. But he said it is not that I don't have any money of my own, I have lots of stock and cash in the bank. It is that I don't want to invest with them. I might believe her, the people with her I have reservations about them. I asked Who are the people with her? There is a Chowdary, Salim, and charsi Rakesh. I can't make head or tail of them. I don't know why she is moving around with them, otherwise, she is a nice girl. She does not seem to be a cheating type. But I can't believe her with them. I said you might be right. I also did not have those feelings for her. She seems genuinely interested in helping people. But otherwise, I don't know anymore. Kirit said she also said she broke up with Rakesh. I have not seen him with them again. I thought about what kind of girl Mahira is. I don't know any other girl other than Sneha.

I am getting to know Mahira. She is the only other girl I moved around with, that is also once. As Kirit said did she break up with Rakesh?

Kirit

For the 31st night, Mahira called for a party at a friend's place. I asked can I bring Kumar also. She said certainly you can bring anyone you like. I asked Kumar to come with me to the party. He said he could not go back home after having drinks. I said come and stay at my home and my parents would not be at home that day. He agreed to the party and he would say he had some work on that day.

On the 31st night, we went to Mahira's party, rather it was organized by her friend. She introduced the friend as Dolly. I am rather struck by her and my eyes were moving around her only. I don't know what it was with her, I could not take my eyes off her. Mahira must have caught me looking at her. She asked do you fancy her? I just nodded my head. She must have spoken with Dolly, Dolly came with two drinks and sat beside me. She handed one to Kumar and one to me. I said hi, she said hey. I am Dolly, what do you do? I said I am doing final year B Com. She said so you are still studying. I said not only studying we both look after a packing tin manufacturing unit. She said you both indicated us. I said I am Manager and he is assistant manager. Dolly said Oh, ok. She said I will just be back and went to meet some new arrival. I looked at Kumar, he is enjoying his drink. the drink was smooth. It must be a costly drink. I looked at Dolly she was speaking with someone, she caught my eye and said sorry without sound and nodded she will come. I looked over her, she is of average height, wearing the latest trend party gown, which is showing her figure, which is plenty. She must be loaded from her dress, this party and the visitors to the party seem to be high class. She came after half an hour, I was following her every move. I did not take my eyes off. She did not seem to mind my looks. She came and sat down with another two drinks gave each one a drink. Kumar seems to take a liking to the drink. He drank very fast and got up and brought something to eat. We ate and drank. When its midnight everyone started counting down. At 12midnight everyone wished each other. After wishing everyone, after saying goodbye to Host Dolly we started for home. We caught an auto and reached my home and Kumar went to his.

Chapter 6

1986 month of Jan.

Kumar

I had to start my new year with a lie. I had to lie to Sneha that I was working and it has become late so I stayed back. She did not feel much about the new year eve, she might have felt different if it had been Telugu New Year Ugadi. All is not lost. We did not have a holiday but Kirit told me to go home early. He said he is going to meet Mahira, for what I don't know.

Kirit

I started the new year with the thoughts of Dolly. Could I meet her again? I have to speak with Mahira. She told me to meet at the restaurant near the Station. I went over to the restaurant. Dolly was there with her. I felt a relief getting to see her again.

Sneha

I went to visit a patient behind the church. While coming back I saw Kumar smoking near a paan shop. I was about to go to him to ask what is he doing there. Then a girl approached and started to speak with him. I thought who is she? He never spoke to me about her. He is talking to her as if he knew her for a long time. It did not seem like she came to him asking for an address. Did he know her before the marriage? Or he came to know her after he came over here. I tried to remember if he had ever spoken about her. I was just standing there and looking. Thought if he looked at me I would get a chance to ask him, but he did not look at my side and he waved bye to her and went into the gully beside the paan shop. I looked where he is going. He went into a big gate, where some security person standing. It must be some company. That girl went in front of me and kept looking at me as if she knew me. But if she knew me, why she did not speak to me? Why did she look at me like that? What is in her face? Is it pity? Does she know I am his wife and does she know he is cheating me with her? What she is thinking about me? All these questions are running through me. I had to speak with Kumar about her, until then I could not get sleep. I went back to the clinic and sat down.

Kumar

I came over to the paan shop at the paint company while smoking Sahithi came over and spoke to me. I always find speaking with Sahithi very easy. We always have something to speak about. She said she came to visit her parents and was going to her sister's place. I finished my fag threw it down waved her by and went to the factory to check delivery. After finishing the delivery, I thought I will go home and have lunch, and walking towards home again I saw Sahithi coming behind me. I said twice in a single day. She said I think I saw your wife looking at us talking. I said no problem, she will understand. I thought better not go home and went back with the van to the factory.

I went home in the night, Sneha served me dinner. I waited for her to bring up Sahithi, but she did not say anything. Maybe she will bring up the matter at the time of sleeping. I was expecting her to ask about Sahithi, but she did not bring it up. Waiting for her to raise the matter, I cuddled her and went to sleep.

Sneha

I am waiting for him to tell me about the girl he was speaking with, but he did not raise the subject. I thought he might tell me before going to sleep, he did not raise the subject. So that means he knew her for a long time. If he did meet her for the first time he would have told me that he spoke with a girl while working. I think I saw her somewhere, might be at the clinic. So many people come to the clinic. He caught me sleeping, normally I would slip into sleep but today the sleep alluded me. With my thoughts, I slipped into sleep in the early morning.

Kirit

I have become friends with Dolly. She would ask me to take her here and there. She would ask to meet her friends, take her to the movies. I am happy to accompany her. She would take me to her house, where she lives alone. I am spending more time with her than at the factory, Kumar had to look after all the work at the factory. He did not seem to mind taking my workload, he must be happy that I could get a girlfriend. Exams are coming near and I could not get enough time to study, I had to take a crash course from Kumar. He would teach me before exams as always.

Kumar

My sister's marriage was fixed to be performed at Hyderabad. We all went to Hyderabad. My brother has brought his hi-tech camera and he was taking photos during the marriage. We were busy with the function. Sneha was

supposed to be with me during some ceremony, I looked for her and she was not found. I asked other relatives, where she is? I skipped from the ceremony and started looking around for her. She is not found anywhere. Where she would go at the time of marriage? I started asking for Sneha with others present. No one said they have seen her. We have completed the formalities without her presence. My mother and father went with my sister to his parent's place. I was supposed to return to Bombay with Sneha. But where is Sneha? At last, after checking with everyone I went to the nearest police station and gave a written complaint. They said they will check and advised me to return to Bombay. I returned to Bombay without Sneha. I opened the door to the house; her non-presence is seen. I could not stay alone in the house, I went to the factory. For the next fifteen days, I was busy with factory work and tuition for Kirit for his exams. I would stay at his house and taught him. His exams finished and I got a little breather. I thought about what happened to Sneha. I went home. I was sleeping at the factory or at Kirit's home for the last 15 days. I went home had a bath and changed clothes. My The mother showed me the photos from the marriage. Seeing Sneha in the photos brought her memories flooding. I started looking at each photo. In one photo I saw her in the background speaking with some unknown person. I asked mom who is he? She said she did not know. I took extra copies of that photo and sent them to my cousin in Hyderabad. I rang him up and told him to contact the police station where I have lodged the complaint. Also, give a hint that he may be from the village where her grandparents live. He went there and gave them the photo and asked them to enquire about the person in the photo.

Kirit

My result came and I have got 59% by the grace of God. Kumar also has a hand in that. If he had not taught me at the last minute, I might have failed in one or two subjects. Sadly, his wife went missing when they went for marriage. He is very distraught and could not concentrate on the work. What can I do in these circumstances? He has fallen behind on the work, I had to remind him of this and this work is pending. In the past which works he would take initiative and do, I had to push him to do it. I thought this would be short term and he would become his old self. Days turn into weeks and weeks into months. His behaviour has not changed. I consulted Mahira. She asked did he have any other girlfriends. I checked with the workers who were working with him. they said Kumar was found speaking with a girl in Vakola. She used to meet him at the Paint company. Once they saw him speaking with her when they went to deliver at Godrej. She might be working there. But how to find her? Mahira gave an

Idea. Take the delivery boy in the evening and wait there to see if you can find her. I went there and waited with the worker, who has seen her with him. After 7 pm she was pointed to me by the worker. I went to her and asked did she know Kumar. She said yes. She asked what happened to him? I said he is mentally disturbed after his wife went missing when they went to his sister's marriage. She said yes, he told me about his sister's marriage, I did not meet him after that. I thought he might be very busy with work. I was also busy. I said tomorrow is a Sunday, I will give him a day off and you go to his house and see what you can do. She asked do you have his address, I know where he stays, I don't know his exact address. I gave her his address and phone no. She said she will see what she can do and went away. I thought today I did a good job and felt proud to help him this way.

Kumar

Kirit gave me off on Sunday. I did not want to take off, I wanted to work, I wanted to immerse myself in work, I want to forget Sneha. But I couldn't forget her. She would be around me all the time. I am filled with her thoughts. I would sit and think about her.

I am sitting in my room and sulking with the thoughts of Sneha. Mother came and gave me coffee and told me to get up and have a bath and have breakfast. I said ok, but I know I won't get up. I had the coffee and put the glass aside. Thinking if I had a weekly off what I would have done if she was present. We could have gone to a movie or beach. We could have enjoyed our day.

I heard the doorbell and I am with my own thoughts and did not have the common sense to open the door. My mother went to open the door. Due to the partition, I could not see who is at the door. I heard a voice asking for me. I got up and went to the door. I am surprised to find Sahithi at the door. She is telling the mother that she is my friend and came to see him. I came from behind my mother and told her to come in. I took her to my room and told her to sit on the bed on the floor. She sat and folded her legs. I asked her what is the news? She said you did not tell me when this big incident happened? I said I did not meet you after that. She said yes, I have not seen you. She asked what happened? I gave her the full story and I could not stop my tears. I put my head on her lap and cried uncontrollably. She put her fingers in my hair and consoled me. After maybe five minutes I lifted my head and said sorry. She said no problem. I said I am sorry, this is the first time I cried like this, being with you brought my emotions out. She said it's ok I am your friend. My mother was standing at the partition door and watching this whole drama. She went inside and brought two

cups of coffee and gave me one and one to Sahithi. She asked her to come inside and sit with her. Sahithi got up and went inside the room, mother is asking her something. I felt relieved by the crying and put my head on the pillow and went to sleep. I felt a tap on my shoulder and woke up. My The mother said Sahithi is going home. I got up and said I will drop her off and come. I went with her and dropped her at home and came back. When I returned mother asked me how do I know her? I said once she had sprained her leg near the ground and I caught her and took her to Uday's house, whose she came to visit. She said ok. I said she is working in Godrej and when I go for deliveries sometimes I meet her there. She said come and have breakfast and went away. After a long time, I had felt hungry and went and had breakfast.

From that week onwards Sahithi would come every Sunday, she would have lunch and go in the evening. One day she rang up and said I am having a flat near the office in Vikhroli, come for house warming ceremony. I said I will come and I and Kirit went there. There her colleagues and her family are present. After completing the ceremonies, she said I will call you in the evening, I said ok. She called me in the evening and asked me to come to stay with her at the flat. I said what your family will say? She said I told them I am staying with my colleagues. They won't object. You can come and stay for a week and see. It will be closer to your factory also. I said ok, when shall I come. She said to come tomorrow morning by 9 am. I said I will come with a small bag, she said ok.

I got up around 6 and readied and said to mom that I will be going on the tour took my bag and went to Sahithi's flat. She took me inside and showed me my bedroom. It was a smaller room compared to the main bedroom. The main bedroom has a double bed and this room has a single bed. It would be sufficient for me. I put my clothes in the cupboard. I felt like I had come to my own flat. I asked her if she need any money for the flat I can chip in as I am saving for buying a flat. Now without Sneha, I don't need to buy a flat. She said she can manage, if she needs anything she will ask me. I said I am going to the factory, she gave me a key to the door, you can come any time. I said thanks and went to the factory. I felt rejuvenated by her gesture. I put myself through the work. Kirit came and saw me working said well you became your old self. I said Sahithi invited me to stay with her. Now I can see her daily instead of weekly. He said good.

Kirit

Mahira's idea to connect him with his friend paid off. Now he seems to be his old self. Now Sahithi invited him to stay with her. She must be concerned about

him. Who will invite you to stay with? She must be his good friend. I don't know much about her. But when I told her about Kumar's condition, she immediately went to his house. Kept on visiting him and now invited him to stay with her. He must have done some good deeds in his previous birth to get such a caring friend. I will give him my scooter and will get myself a bike. It will be easier for him to travel from home to the office. I took the keys to the scooter gave them to him and said you can have the scooter. He said what is the need? I said I want to get myself a bike, if I gave it to you I can ask my father for a bike. He said good and took the keys.

Kumar

Kirit gave me scooter keys, now I can drop Sahithi at the office and pick her up when going home. I will ask her to give me a call when she is ready to leave for the office. I can be there in 15 minutes. We both can go home together. I rang up Sahithi and told her that Kirit gave me his scooter if she wants I can pick her up and take her to the house. She said she will give me a ring when she is ready to go home. I said ok and cut the call.

In the evening I finished my work early and rang Sahithi my work is finished and ready to pick her up. She said to come in half an hour, she would be waiting at the gate. I said ok.

I started on my scooter and waited outside the gate with a fag. She came outside after 10minutes, she was looking for me and I called her to come and we both went home. I asked her on the way does she had food at home. She said she has brought groceries and vegetables. We went to the flat parked at the designated place and went to our flat. She opened the door and when entering the flat I felt a thrill.

I went to my room had a bath and wore a nightdress came out. She was preparing for dinner. I asked her can I help? She said to sit there and I will prepare, let me give you a taste of my food. I said ok and sat on a chair, looking at her working. She prepared rice, roti, and a Bhaji. She put them in serving bowls and brought them to Hall. I said tomorrow you have to let me help you. You are also working at the office. She said my work is sitting in a chair the whole day, I feel little exercise is ok for me. I said but still, you have to let me help you. She said ok baba as if to concede to my request. I smiled at her.

We had dinner and sat and chatted until late into the night. I saw her getting sleepy and asked her to go and sleep. She said goodnight and went to her room. I went to my room and lay on the bed. Thought what is happening with my life,

Sneha went missing, Sahithi called to stay with her. Thinking about them I went to sleep.

I got up in the morning, went into the kitchen. Looked around the kitchen, it seemed empty. Thought what is needed in the kitchen. We need a gas stove, fridge, washing machine, and tv. I thought about what I had in the bank. I think I will have enough money to buy all these and a substantial balance left. I thought I will go and have a look at the shop and see what it will cost. I prepared two cups of coffee and took them to her bedroom. She left the bedroom door wide open. I went in and called Sahithi, she opened her eyes sleepily and said what. I said coffee, get up and have it. She sat on the bed took the cup and said thanks. I sat on the bed and we both had coffee. I wanted to have a fag, but I don't keep them with me. I thought I saw a paan shop nearby. I said I will be back in five minutes, went down and got a packet took one out and smoked there. After finishing, I came back to the flat. She must have understood and did not say anything. I asked her what we need around the house, we need a Gas stove, fridge, tv and washing machine. She said we need a dining table and Sofa too. I said good. After dropping her at the office I went to a nearby Gas agency. I showed my ID and said we are starting a new family and we need gas urgently. He said for rupees 5,000 I could get a double cylinder and a gas stove. I paid and he prepared the vouchers and gave me a bill. I said I will get my van and collect it. Then I went to an electronics store. There I selected the required items and they billed it, I paid the amount. I asked them will they deliver or I had to get them. They said I can get them myself. I went to a furniture shop and ordered a sofa and dining table. They said they will deliver tomorrow. I paid them and gave them the address. Gave them my number and told them to call me before delivery. I called Kirit and told him to send the van. He sent the van with two workers. I collected the items ordered, brought them to the house and helped them unload at home. The shopkeeper said someone will come and install them. So, I left them in their designated places and went with the van to the factory.

In the evening while entering the flat I said to her don't scold me, I have done something. She looked suspiciously at me and said what have you done? I said to come inside and took her inside and showed her what I have brought. She said why did you get all this. I said we need all this, you are also working and I am also working, we need these for our comforts. She kissed me on the cheek and said thank you. I said you are welcome. Two more items are coming tomorrow. She asked what are they? I said sofa and dining table. Then we will

be a whole family. She stared at me as to what am I talking about. I said these are the items required for a family. She just nodded.

Sahithi

With the act of getting the household items, Kumar showed that he is ready to share the house with me. I know we can't get married now. As his wife is missing and if a missing person is not found for seven years, then only she will be declared dead. If she is found and refused to come home, then he can file for divorce. Until then we have to live like this. I know he is married but I felt a strong connection to him from the time I met him. even though we are not married and it is prohibited in our society, I want to be close to him. Now as he is with me, I feel strongly connected to him. I want to be snug with him. let the sofa come and I could sit snuggle with him. I went into a dream world. I thought what was his feeling towards me? Would he accept my closeness? Why would he not? If not, he would not have brought these items. He is taking this as his own house, that is why he is doing all this.

Kumar

I waited at the flat for the delivery of furniture and installation of the items. The electronics shop sent a man to unpack and install the items. Then he fixed the tv antenna on the terrace. Everything is fixed at its designated places. House seems full now. The furniture store has delivered the sofas and dining table, now the house has become full. I let them put them in place and went to the factory.

In the evening I picked Sahithi up from the office and took her home. She looked at the house and said now it is looking like a home. She took me by hand sat me on the sofa sat beside me and said switch on the tv. I used the remote to switch it on. I switched channels, now some serial was showing. We watched for some time. I said we need to prepare dinner. She said let me enjoy this for some more time and pulled me and held my hand and sat. I sat there enjoying her company.

Sahithi

I did not want to get up from the sofa. I caught hold of Kumar and sat and enjoyed the tv. We sat for a long time. Then I remembered to prepare dinner. I got up brought vegetables and sat at the dining table. Kumar came and helped me cut the vegetables. We together made dinner speedily. For the first time we sat at the dining table and had our dinner. It felt like I am having dinner with my family.

We watched tv until we felt sleepy and we went to our room for sleeping.

I heard a sound in the middle of the night. I went to the hall looking where the sound is coming from. Kumar sat at the dining table with a glass of water in front of him. I went to him and looked at him. from the dim light of the night lamp the tears glistened. I asked are you crying? He said no, no I am just sitting here. Aren't you getting sleep? He said no. I took him to his room and laid him on the bed, sat beside him, and stroked his hair. I awoke early in the morning, I was sleeping beside him on the small bed. I got up and went to my room and slept. I woke up when Kumar brought coffee. I got up and took the cup from him. He was about to go out of the room, I called him and told him to sit on the bed. He sat on the bed and looked at the coffee mug. I asked him what happened? He said sorry, I disturbed your sleep. I said you had not disturbed me, I had good sleep. He looked at me and sipped his coffee. I sipped my coffee and put down the cup. I asked Kumar to come near me, I caught his head kissed him on his forehead, and said everything will work out. He just nodded his head. Finishing his coffee, he went away, might be for smoking.

I got up went to the bathroom brushed and went to the kitchen. Seeing the shining new gas stove, I felt proud of his actions. He did not want to trouble me, so he brought a gas stove which is easy to cook. How did he get gas so fast? I went to the hall and asked there is a lot of waiting list for gas, how did you get it so fast. He said got it in black. I asked How much did you pay? He said five thousand. I thought he spends five thousand this for gas, it must cost only two thousand if brought. He is not a miser. He does not mind spending money. He was saying he had saved for buying a house, now he is saying there is no need to buy. He must be thinking of this house as his own, he also offered to pay for this house. He did not know it was passed on to me by my grandmother, who passed away recently. My sister also got another flat from her. I got it painted and it was looking like new. I don't have so much money to buy a flat. I called Kumar and said I got this flat from my grandmother, I did not buy it, so don't worry about money. He said it is not about money, I just want you to have all this, I could not give Sneha anything, I saved like a miser and she missed everything. I don't want you to suffer the same fate. Just enjoy life while we can. Now I understood, why he brought all this. It must be his guilty feeling. He did not let Sneha enjoy her life, he made her suffer to save money. He is thinking due to the miserly behaviour she had left him. What really happened to her, will we ever know?

Sneha

It was more than two months since I got away from the marriage. I still remember that day vividly. I was arranging the flowers and my cousin brother Suresh has come to me and said I want to speak with you on an urgent matter. I asked what is so urgent, the marriage is going on I have to give them these items then we have to sit at the marriage. He said come with me and took me aside. He showed me some photos. I can see Kumar speaking with different girls. One of the girls was the one I saw near the church that day. I still remember the look she gave me as if I am your husband's girlfriend. The things he told me substantiated my thoughts. There were at least three girls in these photos. He told their names Sahithi, Mahira, Dolly. Suresh told me your husband does not love you, he is a Casanova. He goes around with many girls. These are only samples, others I can't show you, they are much worse than these. I believed what he said and went away with him. He took me to my grandparents' place. I thought they will scold me, instead, they welcomed me with open arms and said they knew one day this day will come. You don't have to worry about anything you will have a place with us always. But today I was not feeling well and having nausea and vomiting feeling. I told grandmother this. She took me to a lady doctor they know in the city. She confirmed what I was suspecting. I am three months pregnant. Grandmother advised me to abort the baby. Which I refused. Why should I get aborted, whatever kind of person he may be I will have my baby. She said you can't marry again If you have this baby. I said who wants to marry? I don't want to remarry. She brought me home. She went and spoke something to grandfather. He sent Suresh on some errand. Suresh returned after one week. He said I went to Kumar and spoke to him about you being pregnant. He laughed and said who is the father? She went away on her own. What she is doing there. I told him don't talk like this about my sister, if you don't want her back, sign this divorce application. He laughed at my face and signed it without another thought. He showed me the papers. I sat on the bed and cried uncontrollably. After some time, grandmother came and said now your husband is ready to give you a divorce, so why don't you get an abortion. I said I will never get aborted. You don't ask me again. If you force me, I will kill myself. If I can't live with Kumar, I will live with looking after my baby. They must have thought I am serious about the baby and she went away mumbling something.

Chapter 7

1987 month of January

Kumar

Now it is six months since we are living together, but we never crossed our limits. We are enjoying life as it is. I have read somewhere, in western countries, it is called dating. It is living together before marriage. They spend time together before getting married. I am still married to Sneha, legally I can't marry Sahithi. If having children with Sahithi, they would be called bastards, is it?

I have somewhere in my mind that Sneha would return. What is she doing? Where she is? In what situation she is? Why the police could not find anything? I called my cousin in Hyderabad and he said there is no information from the police. He personally went to enquire. They said they have been to her grandparent's village, there was no information about her there. They said she has not gone to her parents and grandparents. Then where she could go? Has someone done something to her? Why there is no information about her?

Sneha

I am nine months pregnant now. Doctors said any day I would deliver. Grandmother shifted me to the city to be near to a hospital. The doctor checked me and said it could be twins.

On 21st January I had twins, one boy, and one girl. After a week in the hospital, they took me to the village. I thought I should inform Kumar about the birth of his children, so I wrote him a letter addressed to him at his house and asked Suresh to post it. He came back and said he had posted the letter.

Kumar

My thoughts went to kids. Sneha wanted kids but we decided to wait for some time. Our first target was our own house. Now everything went up in smoke.

I have no physical relationship with Sahithi, but if we want to have kids, do we need to get married? Should we get married? As per the neighbours we are husband and wife. There were small incidences between me and Sahithi. It happens when you two stay together in a house for such a long time. Her bedroom door was in the corridor to the toilet and my bedroom door opens to the hall. From the hall, her bedroom will not be visible and mine is open. She

does not keep her bedroom door closed. If I am coming and going to the bathroom I can look into her bedroom. Once I was coming from the bathroom and she was changing, I could see her back. Once she called me to her bedroom to help with the zip. Small, small things which bring some memories back. It was not the same with Sneha in Bombay. We had a small house and we did not get so much privacy here. But in Hyderabad, we used to live freely.

Sneha

Now the children are three months old. Normally I would have gone to my husband's place, instead, I went to my parent's place. Mother took me with the children to the temple to perform abhishekam. After that, we returned home. Neighbours were asking me where have you disappeared for such a long time. Some were asking where is your husband. I felt helpless to answer them, mother took me away before I can answer them. I came to the balcony and looked at the clinic. Now the clinic was replaced by some shop. I remembered how we used to work at the clinic and study on the terrace. My eyes were filled with tears. I rubbed my eyes and went inside. In the evening I took the children to the terrace. We have named them Atul and Reena as per the purohit who suggested the names. I never discussed kids' names with Kumar, now I named them without his presence. On one side I feel guilty about going away from him, on the other side I am angry with what he has done to me. Now Suresh tells me that he is staying with Sahithi in the same house. He has enquired with the neighbours, they are saying they are husband and wife. How could he do this to me? It is not even a year and he has already married his mistress. How long has he been cheating me with her? Is this the reason he was coming late to home? What I thought about him and what he became after coming to Bombay. We should have stayed in Hyderabad. At least he would be in front of me. I could monitor his activities, that might be the reason he acted so innocent here. Is this the reason he took us to Bombay? I am confused about his intentions. He was not like this in Hyderabad, after going to Bombay he was normal until he started working at the factory. He said he is working to save money for a house. When did he change his route? When did he become this person? What I should do under these circumstances. After my letter, he did not even reply, when I thought he will come running. Is he okay? I think I should go to Bombay and see his reaction.

Kumar

My mother called to say my sister came for delivery, she is now 9 months pregnant. She called to see her. I will go and see her. I called Sahithi and told her

about my sister. She said she will also come and then go to her parent's place. We both went by scooter to my house. She met my sister and my sister looked at mother, is she? Mother nodded her head. Mother must have told her about her coming to our house and my transformation after that. Afterwards, my going away to live with my friends, that is what I told them. I don't know if they believe me or not. By bringing her with me did I confirm their theories?

Later I took her to her parent's place and dropped her outside their house.

Sreenu

I saw Sneha at the temple, she came with her mother and two small children. Who are they? Kumar rang me up and said Sneha is missing from the time of his sister's marriage. It is nearly one year. I will call him and tell him. I will see where she is staying. I went behind them and she went to her parent's place. So, she must be staying with her parents. I called his house number. His mother said he not living with them and she will inform him. I told her to tell him to call me.

Kumar

Mother called me at the factory and said Sreenu has seen Sneha at Vijayawada and she is staying with her parents. I immediately called him and asked him for the details. He said she is holding one baby and her mother is holding another baby. I asked babies? He said babies as in twins. I don't know what age they are? They came for abhishekam. So, they must be one month old. Now I am in two minds, one is they are my kids and the other is she has married again and she has kids from that marriage. What has happened? I was really in two minds, to go and see her or to forget about her. I have to consult Sahithi about this.

In the evening while going home, I told Sahithi about Sreenu's phone call. I asked her what could that mean? She was silent for some time. I thought she must be thinking about what I said and did not press her for an answer. After reaching home, she went into the kitchen brought two cups of tea, and sat in front of me. She said from what you have told me it only means that she must have married after going away from you. Whatever reason that could be, she must have got children from him. I can't see any other possibility. I went into my own thoughts. If what Sahithi says is true, then what I am waiting for? I should carry on with my life. How much Sahithi must be suffering because of me?

Sahithi

From what he told me, it could only be one thing. They must be his children. But why did she run away? Was she kept a prisoner? What has happened to her? If she had married after going from here, the timing would not match. When Kumar kept away from me for so long, my thought was he could not perform and she ran away. Now it is confirmed he is not like that, he must have loved her so much, until he could get confirmation that she really ran away, he would keep away from me. That is the reason I told him that she must have married, even though I know the kids must be his. Let me wait and see what his reaction would be. He is staring at the ceiling thinking of something. Must be about what I said.

Kumar

I got a call from my mother at the factory, they are taking my sister for delivery to the hospital. I told Kirit and said I am going to the hospital. I called Sahithi, she said she will also come after taking permission. I said I will come and pick her up from her office. I started on my scooter picked her and went to the hospital. Mother is waiting in the labour room. I asked her how long it will take, she said the doctors said any minute. She said today is her marriage day and today she is giving birth. Then it struck me today is the day Sneha went away. I told my mother it is one year since Sneha went away. Sreenu said she is holding babies in her hand. She asked babies as in twins? I said yes, one in her hand and one in her mother's hand. Mom said if they are your babies, she would have informed you or at least us. I said that's what I thought. Sahithi interjected and said that's what I explained to your son. After half an hour the nurse brought a baby boy and said your daughter had a son and handed him to my mother. We waited for some time and saw my sister and went home. During the ride home I was thinking, if the two of them said the same thing, it must be true. I was so dejected and stopped the scooter at a paan shop. I told Sahithi to wait and went and brought a packet of fags, lit one came back to the scooter. She was looking at me but did not say anything. While on the way, I saw a wine shop, again stopped and brought a half bottle of Rum and brought thumbs up. We went home and opened the door and went inside. I put all these on the table. Sahithi went inside the kitchen and brought two glasses and put them on the table. I thought she wanted to have thumbs up. I put some Rum in my glass and poured thumbs up, I tried to pour thumbs up in her glass, she stopped me and said pour me some rum. I said ok and poured some rum and thumbs up in her glass. She went inside and brought some roasted groundnuts to eat. I sipped my drink and looked at her, she sipped her and made a face. I poured some more thumbs up in her glass. She sipped and showed approval. We sat there and drank two pegs

and set aside the bottle. She said she will prepare dinner and went inside the kitchen. I took a fag from the packet lit it and took a drag. I sat thinking about what my life became. The girl I loved and took a risk by eloping with her is now mother to the children of another person. And I am sitting like a fool keeping away the girl who loves me. Somewhere I read it is not important who you love but who loves you. She took all risks by taking me into her house and giving me shelter, food, and emotional security. Because of her only, I am standing on my two feet, I would hate to think what would have happened to me if she had not come that Sunday to my house and later brought me here. I might have become a drunkard and would be rolling in some gutter like a beggar. Or I might have put my head under a local train. Or endless things could have happened to me. Because of Sahithi, I am in this position. Now Kirit says he is going to make me Manager. He would be working on something with Dolly. I did not ask him for details.

Kirit

Now Kumar became his farmer self, working at full potential. He can look after the factory in my absence. I have got an opportunity to show my potential with Dolly and Mahira. Also, I can be closer to Dolly. They have an investor who wants to start a packing tins factory. I have to start by ordering machinery and get them fixed order materials and start manufacturing. They have a factory place in Nasik. I have to go there and do all these things. I think it would take at least 3 months for the factory to be up and running according to my conservative estimates. It will be in Nasik, it won't be difficult work. I will hand over my responsibilities to Kumar, he will take care of things. I already spoke to my father about this. He has agreed to my proposal. He said go and do your thing, you will learn. Later we can think of starting our own another factory. I told father I have full trust in Kumar, he also agreed with me. He is a hard worker. After shifting to Sahithi's place, he was maintaining timings to pick his girlfriend up to take her home, but that's ok. He has become normal and he does more work than before. He has a knack for doing the work at double speed. I have to learn how he works so fast. However, I will be going to Nasik in two days. I am excited to work with Dolly and Mahira. They both will be present there and Dolly is managing the finances. My work will be to order the machinery and they will make payments.

Kumar

Kirit handed me the factory and elevated me to the manager. I will be reporting to his father, earlier I was reporting to him. If anything, he would go and talk to

him. I don't have much interaction with him. Now I have to go for everything to him. It will be different interacting with him.

I have to see if I can get away from the factory as before. I know I can finish the work fast. But now I have to do two people's work, that would be tough. I said I will be dropping him off at the station. He said he will take train himself. I said at least let me drop him at the station. I dropped him at the station came back. Looked at the orders pending. Made a round of the factory to show that I care about the workers. Spoke to the supervisor and enquired about the problems. I said I will speak with Kirit's father. Came back to the cabin and sat down. Now the cabin looked empty without Kirit. We worked together for the last two years. Now he is going away to another city, I will miss him. But now I can do a better job without his constant watch. I thought I am better at this job than he is. Earlier I had to confirm all the details with Kirit, now I can take all the decisions myself. I think I can better work without constant supervision. I finished the work half an hour early. I rang up Sahithi and said I am ready to leave. She said so early, I thought you would be delayed. I said I work better without supervision. Ok come after 30 minutes, I will wait outside. I closed the office and went to the shop floor and looked at the work going on. Everything is going on well, I said to the shop floor supervisor I headed out and took the scooter and went to her office and waited outside with a fag in my hand. She came out after 10 minutes, chatting with her colleague. Seeing me she said goodbye and came over to me. We started going home, I asked her what you told them about me. She said you are my boyfriend, you come every day to take me home. I asked don't they know I stay with you. She asked why should I give them ammunition to heckle me. I said that is also there. We reached the house and went inside. I said I will have a bath and come and went to the bathroom. I had a bath and came with a towel around my waist and went to my room. I changed into nightwear and came out. She was finishing preparing dinner and said watch the bhaji on the stove, I will also have a bath and come. I said I will look at it. I mixed the bhaji on the stove put some water and came and sat at the table. I heard a sound and looked at the bathroom. I went to the door and asked what happened, she said I slipped come and help me. I turned the knob on the door, it opened and I went inside. She was sprawled on the floor naked. I took the towel, put it on her and helped her up. She put the towel around her and asked me to help her to the bedroom. I put her hand on my shoulder and helped her to the bedroom. She sat down on the bed, asked me to bring her dress to her. I gave her a nightdress and said I will check the bhaji on the stove and ran to the kitchen. I put off the stove and came back to the bedroom. She was trying to put on her dress. I helped her with the dress and told her to lay on

the bed. With difficulty and my help, she lay on the bed. I asked her any pain in her body. She said her right hand is giving a little pain. I took iodex cream and rubbed it on her hand. She said she is feeling better. I said I will bring her dinner and went into the kitchen put the rice and bhaji on the plate and took a spoon, brought it to her. She opened her mouth, I mixed a little rice and bhaji and fed her. After finishing, I brought drinking water and gave her. I said I will have my dinner and brought my dinner to her room and had it. I said I will be back and went and had my fag and came back to her room. I sat on a chair beside her bed and asked her does she need anything. She said nothing. I asked her to do you want to come into the hall? She said she is comfortable here. I went to my room brought a book and sat down in front of her. I read for some time, I lifted my head and saw her looking at me. I raised my eyebrows, she moved her head from side to side. I put aside the book and went and sat beside her and put my hand around her shoulder and pulled her close to me. We sat there like this for a long time.

I awoke suddenly, I must have dozed off with her beside me. I adjusted her on the pillow and was about to go, she said sleepily, don't leave me alone. I said I will come in a minute and went to the bedroom and brought a pillow and slept beside her. She awoke me in the middle of the night. She said she want to go to the bathroom. I helped her reach the bathroom. When she called, I took her to the bedroom. I asked her how the pain was. She said light pain in the back. I said it's ok go to sleep. She caught me and slept. I woke up and saw the time, it was later than my normal wake up time. Sahithi is sleeping beside me. I got up and prepared coffee and brought it to the bedroom and woke her and told her to have coffee. She opened her eyes and gave me her hand to pull her up. I pulled and put pillows behind her back. She took the coffee and sipped it. I asked her how is the back? Better than yesterday. I asked her can you go to the office? Let me see, she replied. I said I will prepare breakfast and went to the kitchen. I prepared everything to make breakfast and came back to her bedroom. She was sitting on the bed. I looked at her, she said she wants to go to the bathroom. I took her to the bathroom and waited. She came out slightly lurching forward. I caught her took her to bed. I told her you might have a problem going office. Stay in the bed for today. She agreed with me. I said I will go to the factory for some time, will come back before lunchtime. I will ring up your office and inform them. I thought we should have a phone at home also. I went and had a bath. After a bath, I prepared breakfast and brought it to her. I had mine and said I will be back before lunch, don't move from the bed. I went to the factory, called her office and informed her position and completed important works and informed Mr. Trivedi that I am going out on work and came home. I opened

with my keys and came inside, Sahithi sitting on the sofa and watching tv. I told you not to move from the bed, I scolded her. I am feeling better, so I came and sat down she replied. I said ok. I will prepare something, what will you have? She said to make some dal and bhaji, I will make roti. I went into the kitchen put dal on the stove and mixed Atta with water, prepared dough and removed the dal and put rice on the stove. On another stove, I put the bhaji and waited for the rice to finish. Removed the rice from the stove and tempered the dal and called Sahithi. She came slowly and made some roti. I brought the food into the hall and placed them on the table. After finishing lunch, I went and had a fag in my room and came out and sat on the sofa. Something was playing on tv and sat watching. After some time Sahithi came and sat beside me. I looked at her and asked how are you feeling now? I am better now can move without much pain she replied. I put my feet up on the teapoy and relaxed. Sahithi linked her hand into mine and came close and sat watching the tv. I felt a little uneasy with her sitting so close. Then I thought how much she loves me and the uneasiness went away. I unlinked the hand put it around her shoulder and pulled her closer. We sat watching the tv for some time. I looked at the time it is around 3:30 pm. I said I will prepare tea and went into the kitchen and brought two cups of tea and set it on the teapoy. I gave her one and I picked one and sipped tea. When I finished tea, I took the cups into the kitchen rinsed and put them on the stand. I went to my room for a smoke and came back and sat beside her.

When the movie finished, I asked her how are you feeling in the back. She moved a little and said better than morning. I said let us go for a walk, that should clear the pain. She asked walking clears the pain in the back? I said to try and see. She changed her dress and we came out for a walk. We went to the market and brought some vegetables and walked back to the house.

She put the vegetables in the fridge and came back and sat down. I asked how are you feeling now? She said better, I am feeling fresh.

We sat down watching tv. My thoughts went to Sneha and Sahithi. What Sneha is doing? Whose children, are they? What about Sahithi? She knew I am still married to Sneha. Is she in so much love with me ignoring this fact? Is she wanted to get close to me? Am I cheating Sahithi? Or Am I cheating Sneha being with Sahithi? What would have happened on that day Sahithi had not come? I owe my life to Sahithi. Whatever I had done for Sneha, she threw into the dustbin and went away. Now I know she is somewhere safe, is it enough for me she be safe somewhere? Shall I contact her? Why did she not contact me? She went with her mother to the temple, if she wanted to contact me she could have found a way. That only means, she did not want to contact me. I looked at

Sahithi, seeing me looking at her, she smiled. I smiled back and turned my eyes to the tv. Am I doing a mistake by turning down Sahithi's advances? Let her decide what is good for her. My only concern is about her family, she did not tell them about me or my staying at her house. If any time they give her surprise by coming to her house, what should I do in that circumstances? What should I tell them, how can I explain my presence in her house? If she says she has taken me as paying guest, will they accept that explanation? What else she can say to them. I turned and asked her what if anyone from your family comes here unexpectedly? She asked why would they come? I said to check on you. She asked why they would check on me? I said to see what you are doing. She asked what am I doing? I said living here with me. She asked so what? I can live the way I like. I said so you don't have any concern that they may find out we are living out of wedlock? She asked are we living out of wedlock? Now I don't have an answer to that. Seeing me speechless, she said they know about us. I said so, you told them we are living together. She said yes. I asked what else you told them? She said I told them about you. I asked what you told me to them? She said that you are a good man, in problems, you are my best friend. I said so they accepted your words. She said they must have, they did not ask me any further questions. I said so they must have already known about me, did your sister tell them anything? She said why are you asking so many questions? I said I want to know what is our future, now I know Sneha may never come back. I want to know how long can we stay like this. If someone questions our intentions, what would we do? I told my family that we had a registered marriage. I asked when did we have? I told them to see their reaction. I asked how did they react? She said they must have had some idea, at least they did not react violently. They showed fake anger and said words like what you have done? You should have asked us first? You don't enter our steps, things like that. I asked is it fake anger or they meant what they said? She said her sister spoke to me later, said don't mind their words, they did not mean what they said. Who they have, two of us only. Come home and say sorry to them. I asked if you say sorry, everything will be all right. She said I suppose so. I said then when are you going to say sorry to them? She said to let them stew for some time. They should call first. I thought she is also stubborn. If their family has no objections why should I deprive her of love? She has done a lot for me. She has taken a risk by bringing me here. Luckily, she has got her grandmother's flat. I should be considerate towards her.

Sahithi

I wanted to see his reaction, that's why I told him about telling my family. He seems to have believed what I said. I know how they will react if I told them

that. Grandmother gave us these flats long back, I had given this flat for rent, recently the tenant vacated the house and I had the house painted and decided to shift here. Also, the Kumar situation has helped me decide to live here. I could ask him to come live with me. None in my family has any idea that I am living with Kumar, they were under the impression I am staying with some girls from our office. If they came to know one of them might have a heart attack, so I will not let them have an idea. If someone from our family comes, I will tell them he is related to my housemates or something at that time. One thing I have to make him believe is it won't be a problem for us to live together. He must be scared of what would happen if someone came to know of our relationship. That is why he is asking so many questions. Now all his questions must have answered, let me see how he would react. Would he react positively to my advances? Only time will tell. Seeing the time, I got up and said I will start preparing dinner. He must be thinking something otherwise he would have offered to help. That is a good sign. He must be thinking about our situation, hoping to get a good reaction from him.

Kumar

If I have not offered to help her, what would she think? I looked at her, she did not seem to notice. What should I do? Let her lead the way. I will just follow her lead.

I got up and went into the kitchen, she said you just sit there I will call you when the dinner is ready. I came out of the kitchen and thought I will have a bath first. I went to my room took a towel and went into the bathroom. Had my bath come out with a towel around my waist. Went to my room and looked around the cupboard for a dress. Sahithi came from behind and hugged me from behind. I stood there to let the feeling sink in. Her chest was pressing on my bareback. I turned around, kissed her and hugged her. I smelled something burning, said to check the kitchen something must be burning. She remembered she had something on the stove and ran over to the kitchen. I thought she is leading, so should I take initiative? I dressed up and went into the kitchen. She is pressing chapatis. I stood behind and smelled her. With the heat in the kitchen, she must be perspiring. Her smell is enticing. I kissed her on the neck and said shall I fry them. She nodded her head. I put a pan on the stove and started frying chapatis. The ones I fried I put in a serving bowl. She completed pressing them and I completed frying them. She said she will have a bath and come. I smelled her once again and said go. She looked at me and went away. I brought all the bowls and put them on the table. I heard the door opening and looked at

the bathroom. Sahithi came out with a towel around her and went to her room. I thought it is my chance to surprise her. I went behind her room. I was about to touch her, she dropped her towel, I ran back to the hall after watching her back.

I sat at the table and waited for her to come for the dinner.

She came after 10 minutes wearing a sexy nighty to reflect her mood. I thought she is in the form today. We had our dinner in silence. I kept staring at her during my dinner. At last, completing my dinner, I went to my room to have a fag.

Completing her dinner, she came into my room and stood there adjusting her nighty. I showed her fag and asked her do you want one? She shook her head, I said I am coming. After finishing I went to the hall and sat on the sofa. She finished her work in the kitchen and came and sat down beside me. I switched on the tv and started watching a show. She put her hand around me sat closely touching her chest behind my back. We sat there watching the show.

When the show was completed, I looked at Sahithi and asked do you want to go to sleep? She said yes and went to her room. I went to the bathroom and went to my room adjusted my bed and sat down to read a book.

Sahithi

I switched off the tv and lights in the hall went to my room switched on a night lamp. I sat waiting for Kumar to come into my room. He went to the bathroom and I heard the flush and he came out and he seems to have gone to his room. I waited five minutes thinking he might come now. I went and looked into his room, he is sitting on the bed reading a book. I thought what is he reading now. I went in, sat beside him put my hand on his shoulder, and looked at what he is reading. He put the book aside and looked at me. I could not read his face. What is he thinking? Is he feeling awkward? He seemed to be in two minds, to act or not. I think I should take initiative. But how to go forward? What needs to be done? He is the one who is experienced in these matters.

Kumar

I put aside the book, looked into her eyes. What are the feelings on her face? Is it love or lust? What should I do under these circumstances? She has come to my room. But my bed is small. Shall I take her to her room? I am a little concerned about how to start with her. She seemed keen to start off. Did she get the nighty for this occasion? How to proceed with her? Why I could not do

what she is asking? She is looking at me with pleading eyes. Is not married to her is stopping me from this? I said to Sahithi let us get married tomorrow. She seemed disappointed, thought for a minute and said yes, let us get married, went away to her room. Now I took a little breather. I thought yes, that must be stopping me from going ahead with her, not married to her. Somewhere in my heart, I had a feeling don't do anything stupid without getting married.

Sahithi

I went into his room with lots of hope, but when he said let us get married tomorrow, I felt disappointed. I said let us get married and stormed out of the room. I did not understand what he meant by getting us married? Can't he perform without marriage? What is his problem? Ok if he wants marriage I will give him marriage, let me see what he does. He came to the door and said I am going to call my mother that we are going to get married. I said I am also coming I will inform my sister, so she could also come. We both went to a nearby std booth and he called his family and informed them. I called my sister and said I am getting married tomorrow and asked her to come. She asked where? I said I will let her know when it's fixed and cut the call and looked at Kumar. He said mother told me that there is a temple in Mahim, where we can have our marriage performed. My mother said she will speak with panthulu there first thing in the morning. He is known to them. I said ok, let us go home. He said we should have a phone of our own, I will speak with father, he can arrange one fast as he is in the department.

Kumar

I got up early in the morning got ready and went over to the same booth I called yesterday. I called home and asked for an update. Mother told me that she spoke to the priest there and he gave a mahurat of 3:40 pm and he will be making all the arrangements, I need to get a Mangal sutra and come also bring the bride with you. I said ok and called Sahithi's sister and told her about the place and time and requested her to make it there on time. She said she will be there. I also informed Mr. Trivedi about the marriage and asked him to come. I came back and informed Sahithi about the time and place and said be ready we will go to my house. When we are ready I took her by scooter to my house. Mother got the things brought from the shop asked by the priest and made all the arrangements. She removed a silk saree for Sahithi and arranged for a blouse for that saree by adjusting the blouse. Then removed some ornaments from the cupboard and made her ready for marriage. Brother went and brought two cabs from the main road, we all went to Mahim temple. Sahithi's sister with

her husband is waiting at the temple. The priest had already made the arrangements and as per the schedule of time performed the required ceremonies. Some more guests arrived there, some from Sahithi's office and Mr. Trivedi. Mr. Trivedi said Kirit could not make it as there is not enough time for him, he might be coming by evening. When the marriage was completed we took the elder's blessings and returned home by cabs. After changing the dress, I said I will return to my room and I with Sahithi returned by scooter.

Sahithi

Marriage was completed without a hitch. The only shortcoming is that I could not invite my parents. I don't know how they will react to my marriage. At least sister could come. Now we are returning to the house. Kumar said they had some ceremonies for the night, but due to lack of space there, he said we should return to our house. I arranged my bed for the two of us to sleep in. We did not have a traditional night, but a formal night would be enough. I could not wait for his touch on my body.

As expected the time arrived for our together time.

He took me in his hands and looked into my eyes. I saw love in his eyes. It was what I was waiting for all this time. From the time I laid my eyes on him, I was pining for this moment. I did not expect to get married to him, it was just a bonus for me. When I came to know from Uday he was married, I felt my heart break in half. When I saw her in the hospital, I got a little hope rise in my heart. I know I am better than her in all departments. I am fairer than her, better looking and better professionally. The only thing she has is the marriage certificate she has with him. Now I also have a license with him to live with him, don't I? In my thoughts, I forgot what he is doing. I looked at myself, he removed my outer garments and I am in my inner garments. After marriage, I changed into a Punjabi suit. Now it's gone. I looked at myself and felt a little shy. He was in his undies and there is a bulge there. I looked at him what is he going to do.

He bent on me and kissed me on my throat. I felt a little tickle and I giggled. He kissed me on the back of the ear. Then he came down to the bridge of my breasts. He kissed there and pulled the bra up and exposed my full breasts. He kissed on my nipples and I felt aroused and they become hard. Then he came down to the stomach and kissed on the naval. He sat between my legs and pulled the panties a little down and kissed there. Then he put the legs close and removed the panties and separated them and sat between my legs. I looked at

him to see what he is doing. In the morning I cleaned there and removed the bushy hair. He kissed the lips of my vagina and pushed his tongue on the vagina and moved around. Then he turned me around and I was on my stomach and he removed the bra button and removed it. Then he entered from behind and started to move rhythmically while catching my breasts. When he finished there, he turned me and tried to satisfy me. When I am fully satisfied, he rolled over me.

We sat on the bed exhausted. Kumar went to his room for his fag. He came into the room smoking. I looked at him and smiled. He asked are you satisfied? I said how I can't be, you are a marvellous lover. Thanks for the night. He said no need to thank me, I should thank you for providing me with all this. Let us go to sleep. We caught each other went to sleep naked.

Chapter 8

Kumar

It is three months since our marriage. Sahithi's sister has convinced her parents about our marriage. She said under unavoidable circumstances, we had to get married. They have accepted our marriage. We started visiting them when we go to our parent's place. Now, my father got a telephone installed at our house.

Sahithi

Sister convinced our parents about the marriage, but she did not tell them about Kumar's status. Not knowing how they will react, I also did not elaborate on this. I pray he or his family will not bring this up when visiting. Otherwise, I will be in the soup. I try not to meet them up regularly only occasionally.

Kirit

Kumar's marriage was informed to me by my father, I could not attend as it was relayed to me at the last minute. And also, I was expecting the delivery of machinery. Now the machinery is fitted and dies were prepared and production can be started. I am waiting for the orders from the marketing team, they must have some contacts here.

Sneha

The kids reached six months, it is difficult to raise twins when all they take is mother's milk. Now I am starting to give solids to the kids. As Atul is elder by five minutes, he is stronger than Reena. Now they let me stay with my parents in Vijayawada. Suresh came and informed me that Kumar had married the girl I saw at the church. He said they were married three months back and showed me photos of his marriage. How could he do this? He did not reply to my letter about his kids. What did he think? There is no confirmation that he did receive the letter. I got a doubt and grilled Suresh. At first, he denied knowing anything. But his face indicates that he is telling lies. After making him promise on his mother he revealed the full plan by the grandparents. According to what Suresh told me grandfather hatched a plan to separate us. First, they sent a person to Bombay and got a private detective to look into Kumar's life. He has collected photos of who he is meeting and where ever he is going. Then according to the photos, they made up stories and told me that he is meeting with girls. Then they forcefully took me to my grandparent's place. There they did not let me

contact anyone. When I wrote the letter, Suresh did not post the letter. The divorce signature was fake and made up by my grandfather. Now I understood why he did not revert back to my letter about the kids. He may not even be aware of the kids. I asked Suresh, what they will gain by doing all this? He said they were angry he took you away from their care. I asked him does it have anything to do with eating non-veg. He said nothing like that. Then what is their problem? What should I do now?

Kumar

I got a phone call at the factory from my mother to come home immediately. I took the scooter and went to Vakola. When I rang the bell, the door was opened by none other than Sneha. I am shocked and could not speak. She took me inside by pulling my hand and sat me in the room. She brought two kids and put them on my lap. They must be six months old. I could not believe my eyes. I looked at Sneha, she said they are your kids only. I could not believe what I'm hearing. What are you saying? Where are you all this time? She said at her grandparents' village. They told me all lies about you and took me away to the village. They did not let me go out to call you. Over that, they showed me you have signed divorce papers when they sent someone to tell you about being pregnant. When I wrote a letter, they did not post it. When I caught Suresh telling me lies and I had to make him tell me the truth, then I came to know all this.

Now I am unable to decide what to do? Her sudden coming to Bombay has changed all my plans. If I have to take her back, what should I do about Sahithi? Sneha said mom told me that you are not staying here. I said I am staying at Sahithi's flat for the last year. When you went away she took me in and made me a person. Otherwise, I would be wandering the streets like a mad man. She said is that so. Mother interjected and said that is correct, he was sitting here without doing anything, not having food or anything. Then Kirit brought her here and she took him to her flat to stay and he became normal. Sneha said let us go to your house. I asked you wanted to go there? She said yes, where ever you stay, I want to stay with you. I asked where are your things? She showed her and the children's bags. How did you come here with all this luggage? Suresh brought me here, he did not come in fearing you might scold him. I said ok, I will get a cab, we can go there. I went and brought a cab. We put her and the kid's luggage in the cab and went to our house. I called Sahithi to come by herself as I could not pick her up.

Sahithi

I opened the door and entered the hall, what I found in front of me has surprised me. Sneha with two kids sitting in the hall. Unable to decide what to say, I said hi. She looked up and said come and see the kids. I went and looked at them. One is a boy in the likeness of Sneha and the other is a girl in the likeness of Kumar can be seen. She said he is Atul and she is Reena pointing at each kid. I took Reena in my hands. I asked where is Kumar, he said there is a problem and went to the factory. What problem I asked? She said something to do with Kirit. What could be the problem, Kirit is in Nasik?

Kumar

I went to the factory, Mr. Trivedi said Kirit called from Nasik police station, there seems to be some misunderstanding. Do you know any lawyer in Nasik, I asked? He said I will check and let you know. Go there and call me. I said I am just leaving. I went to Dadar checked any trains available to go to Nasik, there is one after six hours, I went outside where shared cabs go to Nasik. I took a cab and said I will pay extra if he did not wait too long for passengers. He took two passengers and started to drive to Nasik. We reached Nasik and called Mr. Trivedi, he gave me a lawyer number in Nasik. I called him and said to him to reach the police station. By the time I reached the station, the lawyer is already there. We went and Kirit was sitting on the bench inside the police station. We asked what is the problem. The in-charge said there was a complaint from the bank that someone applied for a loan from the bank showing the factory as collateral. I asked so what is the problem? The bank thought something wrong with the application and approached us. So why have you brought Kirit here? He said he is the one in charge of the factory. I said if he is in charge, why bring him here, did he apply for the loan? He said no. if he had not applied for the loan, then how will he be liable for anything to the bank? He said we have to enquire. I said then you bring in who has applied for the loan. Who has applied for the loan? The loan application is in the name of Kirit. I said did the bank people identify him as the one who applied for a loan? He said no. I said then you don't have any right to bring him for questioning, first you should identify the persons who have applied for the loan. It seems he is the victim here, I said to Kirit you make a complaint that your signature is used in forgery and you are complaining that the bank officials are involved in the fraud with the persons who have applied for the loan. I turned to the lawyer and said now you are aware of the circumstances you take the required steps. I said to the station in charge now I am taking Kirit with me if you have any enquiries the lawyer will provide the details of how to contact us. I told Kirit to come on we are going home, let them deal with the bank and forgery.

We came out and took an auto to the cab stand. We took a cab to Kasara and from there took a local train to Bombay. I dropped him at his house and went home. By the time I reached home its around midnight. I opened the door and went inside. Sahithi and Sneha were sitting and chatting. When I entered they both asked what happened? I said let me sit for a minute, I will explain everything. I sat down and explained to them what happened in Nasik. Sahithi asked how did that happen? I have not asked for details, I have to visit Nasik to find out what happened. That is for another day. Did you two get acquainted? They said in unison yes. How do you plan for sleeping arrangements? I am fully tired, I will sleep on standing. Sahithi said you sleep in your room for today. We will discuss it tomorrow. I said thanks and went to my room and laid down.

In the morning I got up at 7 am. I went to the bathroom and brushed and came out. Went into the kitchen made myself a coffee and came and sat on the bed and lit a fag. Now Sneha has returned and we are in Sahithi's home. What should be our future plans? I need to sit down and speak with two of them. I have to check my bank balance, I have used lots of money for household items. I am still saving but not like before. I used to save like a miser before for buying the house. Now whatever is leftover in the month I am saving, but that is also a substantial amount. Sahithi spends some money on household expenses and I don't ask her for financial details. Let us see what she says about this situation. I always plan for the future but I have not planned for this situation. Now lives of five people are dependent on the decision we are about to take.

After finishing coffee and fag, I went to the kitchen rinsed the cup and put it in the stand and came out into the hall. Sat on the sofa and looked at the door to the bedroom. They must be still asleep. Normally I would prepare coffee and wake up Sahithi. Now I don't know what to do. I waited for some time and made two cups of coffee and took them to the bedroom. I went in and looked at both of them sleeping with kids in between them. I called both of them, when Sahithi opened her eyes I showed cups and said get up and have coffee. She got up and took one cup and I put the other cup on the side table. I came out of the bedroom and went to the bathroom. Had my bath and went to my room for a change of clothes. I kept my clothes in my bedroom only. Dressed up and came into the hall. Then went into the kitchen and started preparing breakfast. I had to go to the factory to speak with Kirit and Mr. Trivedi regarding the Nasik matter. My scooter is at Vakola, I left it there when bringing Sneha and the kids here. Sahithi came into the kitchen, rinsed her cup and put it on the stand. I said I don't have my scooter with me, I will drop you and go to the factory, then I might have to go to Nasik again. We will speak when I return. She said ok, I am

going for a bath. I said ok and kissed her. She went away to take bath. I finished preparing breakfast put it in a bowl and brought it to the hall to put it on the table.

Sneha came out with her cup and went to the kitchen. She came out and said did you prepare breakfast, I would have done it. I said I am getting delayed, I have to speak with Kirit and his father and I might have to go to Nasik to fix the matter. She said ok. I put the breakfast on my plate and started eating. I asked Sneha to get me a cup of tea. She went inside the kitchen to prepare tea. By the time I finished, Sahithi came after bath and came and sat at the table. I told her to have breakfast and be ready.

I took an auto, dropped Sahithi at her office and went to the Factory.

Sahithi

The kids are very cute. They are my husband's children, even though they are not born to me. One advantage is that he may not ask me for kids. I am scared of childbearing. Who will go through all this pain just for children? I am better off as it is. Now I have to plan for her stay. What should I do, let them stay with us or tell him to take her somewhere else? If I say take them somewhere else, what would he do? Take them back to his parent's place, where he was staying. Then he may not come back to me. It would be like I drove him away from me. Then he may ask for a divorce from me because his wife has come back maybe our marriage may become null and void. What I have to do is keep him close to me. We were already married, he would be bound by me, he is a man of honour and principles, he would honour our marriage until I break any rules. The push should not come from me, it should be from her. The best scenario would be I let her stay with us, I have to decide because it is my house. Then slowly seeing our love, she may resent me and force him to put her somewhere else. The push should come from her. Then she would become the villain. I would be heroin in this story. I have to turn the situation in my favour. Kumar said he would be going to Nasik, I have to plan their living situation. I should be shown as the greater person in this relationship. I have to show the world that I have tolerated everything for her and him. This way if any push comes, he should choose me over her. The evening I took permission to go early and went and ordered a double cot bed with a mattress, pillows and bedsheets. The bed and mattress will be delivered tomorrow. I will plan this way, the single bed in Kumar's room I will shift to the main bedroom. The new bed I will put in Kumar's room and will make it our room. She can put the kids on the single bed and she can occupy the bed in that room. Two beds cannot go in Kumar's room.

My bedroom is bigger, so it can take two beds, this way I can become a bigger person, I have sacrificed my bedroom to her. He can decide where he can sleep. At this time with the kid's constant awakening, he may decide to sleep with me. That is a brilliant idea. Even if he decides to sleep with us on alternate days, he will end up sleeping with me daily.

I reached home and entered the house with my latch key. Sneha is playing with kids in the hall. Seeing them my motherly instinct kicked in. I took Reena in my hands and kissed and played with her for some time. I gave her back and said I will have a bath and come. Sneha said Kumar went over to Nasik may not come back today. I said ok and went to bathe. I completed the bath and came back, Sneha preparing for dinner. I said I would prepare dinner. She said don't worry, you work a full day and come home. I have no problem preparing dinner, you just watch kids. I said ok and sat down with them. Playing with the kids is a pleasure that can't be described. I don't know how time passed. Sneha came and announced dinner is ready. She said you have dinner I will watch the kids. I said we will sit here and have dinner, put it in plates and bring it here. We sat beside the kids and had our dinner. This is all a new experience for me. Somewhere in the corner of my brain, I felt if she doing all this to hook me to the kids, then I would not keep them away from me. Then I dismissed the thought, she would not do that, she is not that bright. What I don't know is what lengths women go to get their things if they set their minds to it.

Sneha

From her talks and actions, it seems she has accepted the situation and would like to make amends. We both shifted the small bed from the other bedroom into the main bedroom. She said she has ordered another bed for that room. I can keep the main bedroom for myself and the kids can sleep on the single bed and I can use the double bed. She means I can have the bed and Kumar also, is it? So, she has agreed to share Kumar with me. Is it the other way? Is it not me who has to accept to share him. I have loved him first and he loved me first. We are married first. I had the kids first and she has no kids. From her talks, it seems she does not have any intentions of having kids. She seems to be scared of childbirth. She has seen her friend die in childbirth, from that time she is scared. That would be to my advantage. I have to attach one of my kids to her. She seemed to get attached to Reena. She has not taken Atul in hand but has taken Reena into her hand multiple times. If she is so keen I should attach Reena to her and may make her call mom. That would be the best way to pull her heartstrings. According to her, this house was given to her by her grandmother

but the household items like gas, fridge, tv, and washing machine are all brought by Kumar. If she pushes us out we can take all this and she will be left with an empty house. Then the next day she will be behind us to come back. I have to deal with her with kid gloves. I don't know her fully. I don't know her temperament or her strengths or weaknesses. I have to find these two first, to deal with her. She seemed to love him, even after knowing he is married. What kind of love is that? Or has she taken advantage of the situation? Why did I go away like an idiot? It was my mistake to believe them knowingly. It is the worst blunder in my life. My family says loving Kumar is a blunder I have committed. How loving a person can be a blunder? What do they know about love? We have been together for two years, we never committed an act we would regret later. He has so much patience and willpower to be so gentlemanly. He never treated me abusively. Even in anger, he controls himself. Then speaks sweetly with me. He did not even scold me for going away without informing him. How he must have felt all these days. She has taken the advantage of his situation. What mom says he was in a very poor state when she intervened. It was Kirit who has sent her there to his house. One way she has done a good thing to make him normal another way she has hooked him to her. When I heard he married her, he might have married her because she might be pregnant. But nothing like that. Like us, he does not want to touch her until marriage. So, it must be his principles. He does not want to take advantage of living with her. Overall, I am in a good situation, I should not spoil this by fighting with her and lowering my status in front of Kumar.

Kumar

I went to the factory and had chat with Kirit and his father. From what Kirit says he has ordered the machinery and when they have arrived got them installed in the factory. The payments were made by the company's bank account signed by Dolly and another investor. He is only involved in the selection of machinery and getting them installed. I said even if someone has asked for a loan putting the factory and its machinery as collateral, why the bank has raised a complaint? What did the banks hand in this? Is it to discredit Kirit and his work of setting up the factory and disown him and his work? What is their motive behind all this, I have to go and find out? I told Kirit it would be better if you stay here for the time being. I will go and enquire there.

I went to Dadar and from there I caught a local train to Kasara. From Kasara I engaged a sharing cab and reached Nasik. I rang up the lawyer and asked for a

meeting with him. He said come over to his office and gave me an address. I went to his office and enquired about the progress of the case. We both went to the police station and asked to see any evidence they might have. They said they only have the complaint from the bank. I asked How can you act from the complaint, without any enquiry? They said that is why we did not arrest Kirit. We brought him for enquiry only. Then go and collect from the bank the details of the loan, we will go to court and file an injection for them to give the details of the loan application and the bank account details. I said to the lawyer you prepare an injection against the bank for providing the details of the loan against which they have complained. You also prepare a legal notice against the bank for a defamation suit on behalf of Kirit. We will serve them the notice if they are unwilling to provide the details. We went to the lawyer's office and prepared both of them and went to court and filed for injection against the bank for providing the details of the bank account details and loan application details.

We received the injection from the court against the bank and we went and served the same with the bank. They said they will consult their legal counsel and come back to us. I said I will stay at a nearby hotel and went and took a hotel room and put my bag.

Sneha

Sahithi went over to the office and I am left alone with the kids in the house. After one hour someone rang the bell, I opened the door. They came to deliver the bed. I put them in the second bedroom. They put it where I suggested and took the signature on delivery challan and went away. I checked the bed it was better than the one in the main bedroom. She must have got this for her use. I arranged everything. Now the room seemed smaller. Another small bed would not fit there. That might be the reason, she put the single bed in the other room. I heard one of the kids crying, it must be Reena and went over to look after the kids.

Sahithi

I came home from the office around 6:30 pm. Even though I have more work I left the office thinking Sneha would be alone with the kids. I seemed to have found an attachment with Reena. I wanted to go home and hold her in my hands. I opened the door with my keys and entered and the hall was empty. I looked into the bedroom the kids were sleeping on the single cot. I looked into the other bedroom. The new bed was set up and nice looking. I went in and sat on the bed. The touch of the soft bed is nice and I felt drowsy just by sitting on

it. I thought how nice it would be to sleep beside Kumar on this bed. Thinking about him aroused me. I went in and looked in the kitchen, Sneha was preparing something. I went and took a towel and went and had a bath and came out, put on a nighty. I went into to kitchen and asked Sneha did Kumar call you? She replied yes, he will be staying in Nasik today. I said ok, what are you preparing? She said Sambar. Kumar used to prepare dal never made sambar, I said ok smells nice and came and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv. When I heard a cry from the bedroom, I went and looked its Atul who is crying. I went and lifted him and I felt a rush of emotions flow through me. I hugged him tightly and brought him to the kitchen. Seeing me holding Atul, who is sleeping calmly on my shoulder, she asked is he crying? I said he was crying and I held him and he went to sleep. She said you seemed to have a way with kids. You can put him back on the bed. I took him to the bedroom and put him on the bed and touched him lightly on the back. He moved a little and went back to sleep. I sat there and thought about the feeling I had when I held him. is it what is mother's love? But I thought I was connected to Reena, but the feeling I had when I lifted Atul was much more than what I felt for Reena. How is this possible? Is it means I am more connected to Atul than Reena? Is it because he is Kumar's son?

Sneha came and said Dinner is ready. As both the kids are sleeping I went with Sneha into the hall and sat at the dinner table. She served the food and we had our dinner and we went and sat in the bedroom with the kids.

Kumar

I rang up Kirit and spoke to him regarding the details of the factory. I thought I should go and visit the factory and see its position. I asked him about the details of the staff and workers. He said they have appointed some workers and they have not started working yet. I asked what about Dolly and Mahira, where are they staying. They are in the same hotel I am staying. I said I will call him later, went down to the reception. I said I want to meet Dolly or Mahira, I was told they are staying in the hotel. He gave me their room number. I went to their room and knocked. Dolly opened the door. I said Hi Dolly is Mahira here. Dolly said she is in the bathroom. I asked can I come in? she opened the door wide and said come in. I went in and sat down on a chair.

After 5 minutes Mahira came to the room dressed and sat down in front of me. I said Hi Mahira. She said Hi. I asked so, what is going on? Nothing important, she replied. I looked at Dolly, she just shrugged her shoulders. I thought their demeanour seems to show they don't care for anything, which seems unusual. Mahira is chatty. She can't stop talking, this I am sure. Now she is not talking

anything seems abnormal. I keep looking at one another. At last, Mahira spoke, how come you are here? I said I came over for some work, I am staying in the same hotel. Kirit told me you are also staying here. Dolly asked Kirit told you? I said yes. So how is the factory work is going on? Is it ready yet? Mahira said we are waiting for orders. I said you did not have any orders yet? Dolly said we have approached some customers, they are considering our offers. They are acting as if nothing has happened. I asked whose name the company is on? She said one of our investors is. He is a sleeping partner, he has given us the authority to run the company. I asked did you register your company? Yes, dolly replied. I said then it would be in the registry, is it a company or partnership? She said company. Then it would be easier to know, I said and got up and walked out. I called the lawyer from my room asked him to find out whose name is the factory registered. Then we can follow the money.

I went to my room and picked up a book. I always keep a book or two while travelling. It is a book by James Hadley Chase, hit them where it hurts most. I was reading interestingly in the book when the hero was hit on his head from behind, the doorbell rang. I opened the door, Mahira was standing outside. I said come in, she came in and closed the door and locked it. I went and sat on the bed. She came and sat in a chair. I asked what is going on? She said I told Dolly I am going for a fag. I have to talk to you about the factory. Ok tell me, I said. I will come later, I wanted to check your room. I will come after 10, please keep the door unlocked. She opened the door went away. I thought what did she want to tell me after 10? I went back to my book.

I waited until 11 for Mahira to come and then locked the door and went to sleep. I heard knocking on the door. I switched on the light and looked at the time. It is 2 am. Who is at this time? I opened the door, it is Mahira at the door. I asked what are you doing at this time? She said let me come in. I moved aside so she could come in and closed and locked the door. I asked what happened? Why are you so late? She said Dolly is not letting me speak with anyone. I asked Why? What is happening? Dolly was involved with a gang of people who cheat people. They have set up the factory, they will take a loan on the factory and machinery and then they will divert the money as payments to their companies. Then they will strip off all the machinery from the factory, the bank will lose the money they have lent. But why the bank has complained to the police. The money for the machinery is paid after the loan is allotted and now they have suspected the machinery will be stripped. Someone in their gang has warned the bank. They are trying to find out who is that. That means if the machinery is stripped, Kirit would have been arrested for fraud? Mahira said might be, I don't

know who would be arrested? Because I don't have full details of the company. Now the factory has been sealed by police, they can't remove the machinery, so they are trying to cut down losses. I said let us go to Bombay before they find out you have slipped out. I will pack my bag and we will go. I picked my things in the bag and we slipped out of the hotel and went to the cab stand. We took a cab and reached Bombay. I took her to the factory and we sat with Kirit and his father. I explained the modus operandi of the people who hired Kirit, how he was about to fall into the trap. It is good that you have escaped in the nick of time. I will drop Mahira at her home and go home. Tell your lawyer the details and tell him to take necessary action there.

Sneha

It is around 4 pm, I heard the door opening and went into the hall, Kumar returned from Nasik. I went and hugged him. After a long time, I got to hug him. I showed him the arrangement of the bedrooms, how we planned to sleep and it is his decision to sleep where ever he likes. I asked him did you had your lunch. He said he had something at the factory. I will have a bath and come. After the bath, he went to his room to get his clothes. There were some adjustments and Sahithi has used the cupboard to put her clothes also. I removed his clothes and gave him. It was more than a year for me and I hugged him from behind. We spent some time having sex and when I heard the sound of one of the kids crying, went looking into the other bedroom.

Kumar

I sat in the hall and switched on the tv. Kirit's problem is almost solved. It is now the police's duty to find the gang. Now about Mahira how much, she is involved and Dolly's involvement has to be determined. Now Mahira is safely at home and what she does in the future is her problem. Now I have to look at my problems. How to deal with these two ladies. One is a mother to my children and wife other lady is also married to me and loves me and has taken a risk with her parents. Looked after me for a year. At least they seemed to have agreed to stay together. Sahithi has given her room to Sneha and had taken a smaller room. That means Sahithi has accepted the situation. Sneha does not seem to mind the present situation and she has also bowed to the present situation. Now it is my turn to accept the situation.

Around 6:30 Sahithi opened the door and entered, she saw me sitting said Hi, when did you return. I said this evening. Where is Sneha she asked? I said must be with kids. She came and sat beside me and said did she tell you about the

sleeping arrangements. I said yes. She said it is your decision to finalize your routine. I said ok. Let us see how this will work out. She said I will change and come and went to my room as she shifted her clothes there. She took her clothes and went to the bathroom for a bath. She came after the bath and sat beside me. She asked so tell me what happened? I explained in detail what we deduced from the details gathered. In the meantime, Sneha came from the bedroom and said you have come, do you want to have tea? Sahithi replied yes. Sneha went into the kitchen, prepared tea and brought it. We had our tea and I went into my room to have fag. Now I have to choose a new place for my smoking.

Chapter 9

1988 month of January

Kumar

Now the kids are one year old. I have planned to have their birthday by calling near and dear. We have arranged the party at our house. It is a small party with cake cutting and dinner. We have my family, Kirit, Sahithi's office staff and some neighbours. Most of the neighbours are known to Sneha. She has started her practice at a small pace. She treats small things and provides medical certificates. Due to the kids, she could not work at a clinic or something like that. She treats neighbours who have cuts, sprains and things like that.

Only a few people left for dinner. When the dinner was completed one by one people left. Only my father and mother are left. I told them to stay the night as it is already late. I gave them my room and Sahithi slept with Sneha and I slept on Sofa. In the morning mother said she want to stay for some time here to play with the kids. Father said he did not have any dresses here and he will go home and then go to the office. I said I will go later, get her some dresses. Father said he will pack a bag and keep it with neighbours.

I dropped Sahithi at the office and I went to the factory. I enquired about any deliveries to the Vakola area. They said they have a delivery for the paint company. I said while returning I have to pick up a bag from our neighbours. They said ok. In the evening they brought the bag I took the bag, picked up Sahithi and reached our home.

I opened the door and went inside, dropping the bag on the table. Mother is playing with Atul. When Sneha came here, she did not stay there for long. Now it seems mother has taken a liking to Atul. As long as he is awake, she is keeping him on her lap or hands. One way it is good she has taken a liking to him, another way it seems she would spoil him, with her love.

Sahithi

With the arrival of Kumar's mother, the house atmosphere has changed considerably. She seems to like me more than Sneha. Maybe her going away without informing might have something to do with her thinking. Another thing, when Kumar was down, I had taken him in my house and made him normal might also have something to do with her liking me more than Sneha. When we returned home, she asked me what I like to eat? I said anything is ok with me.

We had dinner and we watched tv for some time. Kumar's mother said she would like to sleep with the kids. She slept with Sneha and we both slept in the second bedroom.

Kirit

It seems Dolly is one of the masterminds in the scam to cheat people. Mahira met once or twice after that. She said sorry that I did not know about Dolly. I thought you liked her, I did not know about her background. She also used me to meet other people. How many people were trapped by her, I don't know. I heard she is still at large. She is good at avoiding the police. She must be in Delhi or Calcutta by now. I said at least I escaped unscathed. I am grateful for Kumar who has come for help at the correct time and has taken measures to save me from them. I asked her why you did not come for the kid's birthday, did he not invite you? She said he called me at the house and I did not take his call. Kumar was asking about you. He wanted to thank you for the information you gave him. You did not meet after coming back from Nasik. She said I should thank him he has brought me from Nasik in the night to here. Otherwise, I would be stuck with Dolly and her gang. She did not suspect then, otherwise, I would not be able to get away. Thank him from my side. I said I would do that.

Sahithi

Kumar's mom said come we will go shopping, I will get you some bangles. I took her to a nearby shop. On the way, she was asking why did you let Sneha stay at your place? I said if I did not let her stay with us, Kumar might take her maybe to your place and I might not see him again. She said that is also there, you should make her go back to her parent's place. Once she went away without informing anyone. Why did she come back? I did not like her when she went away like that. You have seen what Kumar made himself off. If you had not come that time, what would have happened to him? He was ignoring work, food and everything. I will accept the children are his only. But why does she should come back when you are having a good life, again to bring conflict in your life. I said I like the kids, I don't have any problem with her coming back. She said you should take the kids and let her go back to her parents. I said don't worry about that, she is required here. If we take the kids and let her go away, who will look after the kids, we had to appoint an ayah or a servant for the kids, they may not look at the kids like their mother. Let her stay how long she wants to stay. I also did not understand why did she had returned now. Maybe someone must have informed Kumar had married again. As our house approached, we have

discontinued our discussion. The thing why did she return was behind my mind for a long time.

Sneha

I have not seen the support she offered after our marriage, is not seen in Kumar's mother now. She must be still angry that I went away without informing anyone from her daughter's marriage. Maybe she was angry that at the marriage, she had to explain to everyone what happened to me. She must have felt humiliated in front of relatives who had come to the marriage. She must be keeping that anger still in her mind. That might be the reason she was more distant with me. She was talking very freely with Sahithi. She is also good with the kids. When I came over, I had a doubt, would she accept the kids as grandkids. But she must have accepted the fact that they are Kumar's children. I had no doubt about Kumar accepting them. He was the same Kumar I fell in love with, the same Kumar I eloped with and married. He did not change a bit, he accepted me as I was. He did not keep any anger in himself, he seemed glad that I returned back. It did not matter to him that he already married thinking I might not return. What would they have filled his mind to get him to marry her. She must have done a number on him. I know him for what 8 years now. How he was with me all these years. It was my mistake to believe what Suresh told me that day. But he has twisted the reality into their narrative and told me lies to get me away from Kumar. After all, this happened how did I believe what they said. When they said those things about Kumar, why did I believe them? It was my foolishness not to realize they could be telling lies about him and I paid the price for that, I had to stay away from Kumar for more than a year and the situation had turned so bad he had to get married and I had to share Kumar with her. What my life became because I believed what they made me believe. I am myself to blame, none other.

Kumar

I asked Kirit I wanted to meet Mahira. He arranged to meet her at the usual restaurant near Andheri station. I took a packet of fags and entered the restaurant. This time she is alone and none of her usual friends were there. Kirit asked her where is everybody. She said I have become untouchable with them, they have all abandoned me. I said nobody abandoned you, true friends always return. I came to say thanks and sorry I have misunderstood you. She asked why sorry? I thought at the beginning you were after Kirit's money. But what you have done in Nasik has opened my eyes. She said I heard you had your twins birthday, when did you have kids? I did not know. I said my wife went away to

her grandparents' house and they did not let her contact me. She gave birth there and when the kids were six months, she returned. By that time thinking she would not return, I married again. She laughed you married again and now you have two wives. I said yes, I am sandwiched between two wives. She asked who is enjoying the sandwich?

We got up to go home, she asked Kirit can you drop me off. I said I will be going that side, I will drop you off. Kirit needs to drop you and come back. She said ok, I took her and dropped her at her house. She said come and meet my family. I said some other time. I was about to start the scooter, I heard a voice call Mahi, I looked behind. Her sister was coming down the stairs. She introduced me as Kumar and She is Farida. I said glad to meet you and drove off to my house.

Kirit

I think we can continue our friendship with Mahira. Kumar instead of being angry with her told her sorry and thanked her for her help in Nasik. She also seemed to be lost after the Nasik incident. All her friends seem to have disappeared. She was sitting alone. I felt sorry for that. She thought that by starting the Nasik factory, she could get some business for them. She wanted to show her marketing skills. Instead, she had herself troubled by them as I was. I asked her where she is working now. She said nowhere in particular. She had appeared for an interview with a company, waiting for their response. I said you will get somewhere, don't worry. She said I am not worrying, only looking for some work.

I got up and said bye to her went to my house.

Sahithi

I thought over what mom said about Sneha. It only seems she has anger issues with Sneha. It might change over time and she might change her opinion of her. Another thing is why should we take over the kids and make her run away again. Let her look after the children. Why should we take the burden of looking after two kids? Also, she is not sitting idle. She is looking after the home, preparing food, doing the household chores. Doing her doctorly things, whatever she is doing. When I needed to submit a doctor certificate for leave, she had given me that. I thought about where I had to go and look for them. She is also not demanding much of Kumar's attention. Most of the time Kumar is sleeping with me only. It seems she has lost interest in Kumar. That is also to my advantage. Why should I take her as my competition? She will stay as a maid in my house. If

she does any hara-kiri, she would have to go away from my home, she can't remove me from my house. If she wants she can go away and stay at Kumar's parent's place, his mother may resent that. I have to concentrate on work, promotions are upon us and also increments.

Sneha

After coming back from shopping, Sahithi's demeanour has changed. What mom might have told her about me? I think she is trying to act normal with me. Now as mom went away our house might come back to normal. Are all mothers-in-laws being the same? At least she is not staying with us or we are not staying with her. She would put fire between people. What Sahithi thinks about her. She would think she is god because she is supporting her. What would be Kumar's take on all this? He would act neutral, what would he lose? He is acting neutral from the time I returned back. He is not supporting Sahithi or me or his mom. He is like don't bring me into your women's problems. He has learned to shrink away from responsibilities. He was also not like this with me, he spends his time mostly in the hall or in her bedroom. He seems like he resents children, if they wake up in the middle of the night, he would go to her room to sleep. Slowly he started sleeping there only as if the kids are disturbing his sleep. I don't get enough sleep with two kids. He must still be having reservations about the kids or is it that because I went away he acting like that? At least he is letting me live with him. He did not put us at a different place and come once in a while. At least he is in front of me. I have to change my strategy with him. I should pull him towards me.

Kumar

Sister sent her son to stay with mom for some time. Mother asked me to send Sneha for some time there to help in the house. I took Sneha and the kids by cab and left them there.

I went to the paints company for a cheque collection. I took the cheque and went to meet the purchase manager. His name is Muralitharan and he is from Madras. I spoke to him about purchases. There is an old man named Patel, who is a Gujarati, who cracks jokes. There is a cabin at the side. I asked whose cabin is that? He said it is a server room. I asked what is a server room? It is where we keep our computer server. I looked through the glass, there is a tall computer and lots of wires going from that. He said it is a Unix server. I said ok and took the orders and went back to the office. I gave the orders to Kirit and said I had been to the paints company, they had a cabin in the purchasing department, he

is saying it is a server room. They have computers there. On his desk, there is a small box and a tv, he said it is a terminal. From there they feed the purchase bills on the computer. He printed this purchase order from the terminal. Now they don't have to write them on paper and give us. It will be clear to us, right? We can't make mistakes now. We can't say we have read them wrong. He said we have to be more careful fulfilling their orders.

We should also get computers I said. He asked what will we do getting a computer? I said we have to learn to use the computers. There are some institutes that teach the computers like apple computer institute, Datapro, etc. I heard computers will be our future. Kirit said we don't know anything about computers, what will we do with them?

In the evening I picked Sahithi and went to our house. I opened the door and entered. House seems empty without kids and Sneha. There was no one to bring me tea when I come home. Now I understood, how much I miss her and the kids. Sahithi prepared dinner reluctantly. She was habituated with Sneha preparing everything. After dinner, we sat in front of the tv. We watched for some time and retired to our room. After a long time, we were alone and we enjoyed the night.

I got up around 7 am. I prepared coffee and woke Sahithi. I asked her are you preparing breakfast, or shall I? She said she will. I went to bathe and dressed and came to the hall. She brought the breakfast and put it on the table. I looked at Sahithi. After how long did she prepare breakfast? After Sneha came back, this must be the first time. I miss the kids, they are always moving around making some sounds or other. When they are not around, we will know how much we miss them. Does Sahithi miss them? I don't think so, she might feel them as a disturbance. As soon as they get up, they come into our room and wake us up.

Sneha

I have been at Kumar's parent's place for a week now. To look after 3 kids is a very difficult thing. At least to please Kumar's mom I have to help her with the boy. It has become very difficult for mom to look after the boy even with my help. She called her daughter and she came and took him away, I returned home. I returned home after a month and I found the home in disarray. I always keep the house in tip-top condition. Might be their busy schedule, they have not been able to look after the house. I put the kids to sleep, started reorganizing the house. It took me two hours to clean up the house. I sat beside the sleeping

kids and thought about what my life become. I might have left home without telling anyone. He has married someone else in the meantime. When I came to know about his marriage I came back with kids. I have accepted her even though I could have asked for their marriage to be nullified. I did no such thing. I let them look down upon me for the kid's sake. If I ask him to keep at a separate house then he may keep us at a separate house but he may not come to our house regularly, at least now he is in front of me every day. Better to maintain the status quo with Kumar and Sahithi. I have myself to blame for this situation. If I had not gone away, Kumar would not have dared to do this. He would never have married her. He must have thought I would not return back after knowing about kids, did he think the kids were not his. Someone from Vijayawada must have informed him about me having kids. They may not have known the age of the kids. Or have not informed him. He must have thought, I must have married again and he took this step. I know him well, he would not take this kind of step lightly. I was told he was staying with her for a year before marrying her. Sahithi told me that before marriage, he did not even touch her. It is his character. When she asked him to spend the night with her, he asked her to marry first. He did not touch her before marriage. Did he marry her for sex?

I heard the doorbell and opened the door. The watchman came to deliver the electricity bills. I took it and closed the door. My chain of thoughts broken, I started preparing food for the kids.

Sahithi

We returned home and opened the door with my key, finding Sneha is a relief for me. Doing the household work has become difficult. Kumar also not helping as he did previously. After Sneha came to stay with us, she used to do all the household chores and I have started concentrating on our office work ignoring household work. For the last month, I had literally done everything around the house. I thought of telling her not to go away for such a long time. Then thought if I tell her that she might think she has become irreplaceable and will get proud. Even though she is not a real doctor, she acts like one. She is suitable for villages, from where she came. At least her medical certificates are useful for us. Let her look after the house and kids. She is fit for maid work only.

Kirit

After Mahira's meeting with Kumar, I heaved a sigh of relief. I thought she was totally responsible for the Nasik fiasco. After Kumar explained everything when he met her, it was clear that she is also a victim as much I am. I have lost a few

months of work as her. But we both could get out of the mess thanks to Kumar's timely intervention. He had saved both of us from humiliation and whatnot. That is the reason I have not taken over his position of Manager, let him continue in the position I gave him when I went to Nasik. At present I am brainstorming with Mahira, we could do something together. She had regained my trust in her. Maybe her other friends might come back to her.

Kumar

Sneha returned, I felt relieved from the daily chores. She has spoiled our routines. I missed seeing the kids. I went there once or twice when visiting Vakola to see the kids. Sahithi did not seem interested to visit. Did she really like kids are its just showoff? When Sneha returned she acted as if she missed the kids, then why did she not show interest in going to see them. She could have gone there when visiting her parents. Is it because she has not informed her parents about Sneha? One way she is also right, what she could say my husband's first wife has returned? She did not inform them at the time of our marriage, she is marrying an already married person. Only her sister knew about me. What she might have told Sahithi when she knew about Sneha returning? What advice she might have given her?

I am getting bored with the factory work. It has become routine and nothing else. At least Kirit let me be Manager. Otherwise, I might have left if he has demoted me. He let me handle the factory as I seem fit. If anything, major, I would go to Kirit else I am capable of taking decisions on my own. Sometimes I feel what am I doing in this factory?

Kirit

Mahira came to me with a proposal for a hotel. There is a hotel between Bombay Central and Central Bus stand. The owner who was running it was dead a few months back. His son is not interested in running it and wants to lease it to anyone who wants to run it. He will take a low rent but want a share in the profits as he wants to go and work abroad. I asked what is his name? She said, Kista Rao. I said let us go and meet him and see the hotel, then we will decide. She took me to Kista Rao. He is young around 22 years. He seems to have not done any work in his life. It is in a very good locality. Between station and bus stand. There will be floating populations. Lakhs of people move around the hotel. I asked him about the lease and profit-sharing. He put his demands forward. They seemed acceptable. First, we have to do some work at the hotel. Painting the hotel, changing some furniture, etc. We have to estimate the cost

of beautifying the hotel. We went to the first floor and second floor. The first floor was open without any rooms. It can be set up with beds and rented as beds. The second floor has around 10 rooms. They can be given as single rooms after putting up beds. I asked him why these two floors were not used. He said he had no idea. I said to Mahira, all these setups will cost money. Let us go and check the prices of furniture and beds. We went to a nearby furniture shop and enquired about the prices for bulk orders. I said we will come back later and came out. We went to Andheri and made cost estimates for setting up the hotel. I thought will the father be willing to put up the money? Let us check if any other people are willing to invest. I went to the factory and explained to Kumar about the hotel running. When I said the hotel is near Bombay central he has shown interest and asked how much investment is needed? I explained to him the details of the painting, furniture, he said he will think about it.

I explained to father about the hotel. He said are you capable of running it. The location is perfect. He asked who else is investing? I said Mahira will invest a little but will also help in running it. Kumar said he will think about it. If he invests he will also help in running, but he had to look after the factory, I will be busy with the hotel. I am leaving everything to him to look after in the factory. father said after collecting the investments come back to me, I will put up the rest. I said thanks and came out. I asked Kumar what should we name the hotel. He said we should name it Bed and Breakfast. He said he had read that they are very famous in the US.

Kumar

I discussed with Sahithi, the proposal of the Hotel. She said she has some savings, she would like to invest. I also have some savings. I was not saving like before but kept adding to my savings. I told Kirit that our willingness to invest with them.

Sahithi's work pressure increased because they have changed her position and put her in the typing pool. She has full work pressure as everyone asks for her because of her experience. She could not cope with the work and comes home fully tired.

One night I had an upset stomach and went to the bathroom in the middle of the night. When I returned Sahithi was looking out for me and asked me where I was. I said I had an upset stomach and went to the bathroom. She said ok, sleep. She seemed not to believe me. What did I do for her not to believe me?

Then it struck me, she seemed to have thought that I might have gone to Sneha for sex. What do these women think? Can't we go to the bathroom?

I enquired about the prices from where I purchased our furniture. When I told him, I would like to buy in bulk he said he would give me competitive prices for the same furniture offered by the shop at Bombay Central. He said they had overhead costs, which are higher than his and he could give the best prices. I told Kirit about the offer by the furniture store. He said we can order from here and take it by our van if we get better prices.

I ordered the furniture and sent them by our delivery van to the hotel. The painting of the hotel was completed and our workers arranged the furniture at the required places. The first floor was set up as a dormitory with the beds placed side by side with some gaps and we provided cupboards at the sides for each bed. If they have more luggage we have a luggage storage facility available. This dormitory is useful for those who come and stay the night and go on their work. If they like they can come back and sleep and go according to their train or bus timings. The second floor we set up as individual rooms. On the ground floor, we have a restaurant, reception, Kitchen, one room for storage and three rooms for staff to stay. We have put normal cots in these three rooms. Now the hotel is set up and ready for inauguration. We got a local politician to open the hotel. We have got staff for the restaurant and hotel. We started operations. Kirit was sitting at the cash counter in Restaurant. Mahira was looking after the reception of the Hotel. In the night Kirit would close the restaurant and look after the reception. More people were visiting the hotel at night and most of them would leave in the morning after breakfast. Slowly we started getting patronized by the hotel and restaurant. We had our restaurant full throughout the day and our cooks are kept fully busy. We offered them both south Indian and north Indian foods. They are very few restaurants offering both that are also very tasteful. People used to sit and eat, some used to get packed food and get on train or bus. We calculated we would recover our costs within a year.

Kirit

We have a heavy rush throughout the day and it has become difficult to look after the restaurant cash counter. We thought we need someone trustworthy to sit at the counter. I asked Kumar can his wife look after the counter as she is keeping at home only. He said she also has to look after the kids and this hotel is far from home, she will have trouble travelling. We have to make alternate arrangements, for the time being, I asked Mahira to come and relieve me from time to time from the counter.

Kumar

Kirit asked me to help out at the restaurant. I went there and returned late in the night to the house. Both the ladies seem to have had a fight and were sitting with stern faces. I asked each one what is the problem? They did not reply to me instead pointed to others. I remembered my night visit to Sneha's room. Is it the reason for their fight? After cajoling her, Sneha told me to take her away from here. Now where I will take her at that time of the night? I told her I will do something the next morning. I slept on the sofa in the hall for the night. I thought hard, what can I do? I can take her to my parent's place and leave her there. But how long can I keep her there? Another thing is Kirit is asking for help at the restaurant, can she help out there. There are rooms available where she can stay. Mahira is also staying there at night. Both of them can keep each other's company. I called Kirit and said I am bringing Sneha there keep a room free for her. Or keep a room on the second floor for Sneha and Mahira to stay. He said he will make some arrangements for them. I took her to the hotel with some clothes for her and the kids and left them there. This way Sneha became part of the running hotel. I told Kirit we need to install an intercom in our hotel and restaurant. He agreed to it and asked me to check the pricing.

Sneha

Sahithi picked a fight for a small thing and started talking as if I am staying at her home for free. I said to Kumar to take me away from here. He took me to the hotel and put me there in a room. Now I was given charge of the kitchen and storeroom. I had to give the items to the kitchen team from the storeroom and look after the working of the kitchen. This way we could reduce the wastage in the kitchen. I taught the kitchen team about preparing the south Indian dishes. The only problem with this arrangement is that I could not see Kumar daily. He would come some times to the hotel and I could spend some time with him. Sometimes Mahira would leave me to look after the reception when she is needed in the restaurant. In the daytime, there would be less rush in the hotel but someone is always needed at the reception. We did not have phones in the rooms and the guests had to leave messages through the staff.

Kirit

Bringing Sneha, Kumar did us all great help. She has taken over kitchen and storeroom management. She checks the stocks and gets them purchased before stocks run out. She sits whenever required at Reception. Mahira can come and look after the restaurant. Before we could not get time to go to the toilet, now

we can take time off for a fag or something like that. But she might be missing Kumar. Sometimes he comes over and spends some time here.

It is after 11 pm and I heard shouting from the Kitchen, from the reception I ran towards the kitchen. It seems Sneha's saree caught fire and she is burning like a flame. Someone brought a blanket and put it on her. We called an ambulance it came after 15 minutes and took her to the hospital. I tried calling Kumar but the call did not go. I went to the hospital and saw her, she was in no position to talk. Doctors said there is no chance for her to recover as she got 90 per cent burns. I tried again to call Kumar from the hospital. This time call went through and Kumar lifted the phone and said hello, sleepily.

Kumar

I heard the telephone bell ringing from the hall. I looked at the watch, it is around 5 am. I went and lifted the phone and said hello. When I heard that Sneha had met with a fire accident, I fell on the floor. Sahithi must have woken up by the sound of the telephone but when she heard the sound of my falling, she came out to check what is the sound. Finding me on the floor she shook me and asked what happened. I sat up on the floor and said Sneha got in a fire accident. She asked She is not working in the kitchen as a cook, what is she doing in the kitchen? I said she must have gone there for kids milk. She asked which hospital she is in. I lifted the phone and asked which hospital she is in? He said Nair hospital and I said we will be there. We got dressed and left for the hospital. By the time we reached the hospital, she was gaining and losing conscience. I went near her and called her name, with difficulty she opened her eyes and closed them. I looked at the nurse, she said she is in no position to talk, we don't know how long she will be alive. There is no chance for her. Let the doctor come and check her. We waited on the bench outside the ward. After an hour a doctor came and declared her dead. I put my head on Sahithi's shoulder and wept like a baby. When she went away I had a glimmer of hope that she is somewhere alive. Now, all that hope is lost. I called home and informed mom and dad about Sneha. They said they will come immediately to the hospital. There will be formalities for the hospital with the police and postmortem. We waited for the police to arrive and Kirit has given his version of events. I said I don't know what happened. She is staying there as a supervisor with our kids. They said they will go to the hotel and take others statements and gave the hospital go ahead with the postmortem.

We got the body by the evening, we took the body from there to the crematorium and finished our death ceremonies. After that, we came back to

the hotel picked kids and went to my parent's house. Thereafter having a bath and left the kids in the custody of my mother and said for the time being you look after the kids, Sahithi would help you. I will go home and bring us some clothes. I went home and brought some clothes for both of us. I pulled myself together for the sake of kids. Now they are without their mother. Will Sahithi look after them like her own? Only time will tell.

Sahithi

It was very shocking to find about Sneha. I thought Kumar would not come back from the shock when I found him on the floor. But he gathered himself and took us to the hospital. When the doctors told him that she is no more, he was not that shocked, he must have anticipated that. He miraculously picked himself up after receiving the news. He just wept on my shoulder. My presence must have lessened his shock. After crying his heart out he became his normal self and completed all the formalities. Now he brought the kids to his parent's place and told his mother to look after the kids and I would also help her. I informed our office and took some leave. I have to see how I can look after the kids. In the course of the time he would ask me, can I look after the kids. If I have to look after the kids and attend the office, I need to appoint a maid for them in the daytime. I have to see how this works out. Many moms leave their kids at home and come to the office. There must be some crèche nearby where I can leave the kids when they are a little older.

Kirit

After the accident workers were reluctant to work the night in the kitchen. We had to close the restaurant early. Without Sneha's helping hand it has become very difficult to manage. Mahira is also affected by all this.

When we received an offer from a hotel chain for converting the hotel into five star hotel, I informed Kista Rao about the offer. He is very happy and said to go ahead with the offer. Mahira did a good haggling with the hotel management and got us a good price. We collected our goodwill and gave the rest to Kista Rao, who is happy with the price received. This way our hotel business closed down.

Mahira

We collected a good amount as a share of our hard work. Now I am left without any work. Kirit would go back to his factory. other workers would get some work elsewhere. I started my job hunt.

PART 3

After the death of Sneha

Chapter 1

The year 1989

Kumar

It is now six months since the death of Sneha. The police closed the case as accidental death. I have some doubt in my mind that it may not be accidental but someone has a hand in it. I don't have any proof but had a nagging feeling. I am slowly coming out of her death. Sometimes I woke up in the middle of the night with sweat all over my body, otherwise, I am back to a normal person.

Sahithi is looking after the kids as if they are her own. Some consolation. I was scared of how she looks after them. Over time her attitude towards them was consistent and loving. They seemed to have forgotten Sneha and started treating her as their mother. Earlier they used to call Sneha Amma now they are calling Sahithi Aayi. Seeing her love towards kids I left her to deal with the kids as she deemed fit.

Children's third birthday coming but we decided not to celebrate as it is not even one year after Sneha's death.

Mahira

After the closure of the hotel, I was looking out for a job. I saw a job posting and applied for the same. After a week I received the interview letter. I went over to the company, it was a courier company. Recently they have gone international by joining an international courier company. They are going ahead with expansion and they are appointing Marketing executives. One Mr. Steven, Mr. Rajesh and Mr. Jayachandran were taking interviews. Our interviews were taken in the conference room. We were sitting outside the room on chairs placed around. There were some cabins, one door marked President, others marked PA to the president, VP marketing, AVP Marketing, etc. There were some girls sitting behind the tables with typewriters, must be their secretaries.

When my name was called I entered the cabin and said good morning sir I am Mahira. They said their names and Steven is the Branch Manager asked me to sell a pen to Rajesh. I said to Rajesh you should buy this pen you might need to sign something with it in the next hour. He asked what I need it for signing? I said my appointment order. He laughed and said good, what if I don't buy it? I said you will miss a good marketing person. He asked how good are you? I said this good you are continuing the conversation without dismissing me. One good

trait of the salesman is that they should let the conversation flow. Steven said a good argument. Rajesh said by continuing can you sell your product. It will give you the opportunity to show the customer your product. Without having an opportunity how will they know about your product? Balachander asked how will you sell our product. I asked what are your products superior traits. He said we have joined with the biggest courier company in the world. We will bring their technology here. It will be revolutionary in India. I said you just said the selling points. I will follow up on these points for selling. Steven said I think you are the best marketing personnel I have seen today. You are hired. We will give a salary as per our scales. You contact HR for that. If the salary is agreeable to you, you can join us. He took a form filled in my name and position and said to take it to the ground floor to the HR cabin. I said thanks and came out.

Kirit

Mahira called me to the restaurant. I went there and asked her what is so urgent? She said I got a job as a Marketing Executive in a courier company. I asked where is my party. Get Kumar also I will give you both party. How is he doing? He is better now. It is a big thing to get out. When his wife went missing he became someone else. It took me a great deal of effort to get him back. Luckily, I found Sahithi, she brought him back. Now Sahithi is with him, he is better because of her. She is also looking after the kids. I thought he would go to pieces because of her death, but he recovered well. He is not ignoring work also. Now I am also there to supervise him. Mahira said bring Kumar with you on Sunday I will give you both a party. I said ok and left.

Sahithi

Kumar is not still his former self. He gets up in the night terrorized. He gets up and sits with a cup of tea or coffee in front of him. I chided him for sitting like that and called him to bed many nights. Kumar's mother got a poor girl from the village to look after the kids. We gave her the second bedroom and we put the children there with her. I have exchanged the beds in the bedrooms. She looks after the kids during my working hours. I give her free time after reaching home. If the kids wake up in the night she would look after them. Mom promised their family that we will look after the girl and when she reaches age we will get her married to a suitable boy. Something she will look forward to. She helps me in the kitchen and keeps the home clean. She would be a good wife and mother when she marries. Without her, I could not cope with the work and children. I still miss Sneha. She would look after the house and children when she was

alive. It was a bad day I fought with her. I still feel bad for fighting with her that day. She would not have gone to help at the hotel.

When he said on that Sunday he is going to a party given by Mahira, I did not object. Let him enjoy himself with his friends.

Kumar

I took permission from Sahithi for going to Mahira's Party. Kirit came to collect me from home. Sahithi told him to take care of me. She told him he has become very sensitive after Sneha's death. He said he is aware and he will look after him. we went to Kandivali station where Mahira said she will give the party. There was a restaurant near the station, we went and sat in the A/c room. It was very dim lighting there. We could not see what is in front of us. There was a guy sitting there. She introduced him as Tony and he is looking after the Kandivali branch, where she was posted as a Marketing executive under Balachander who is in charge of the branch. I said glad to meet you. I can only see his outline. He is around 5feet 8 inches in height with a broad body. She said he is a courier boy with the branch. They both visit companies in surrounding areas. She ordered drinks and we sat and sipped our drinks and ate what she ordered. After our lunch, we went and sat at their branch office. There was a sofa in the backroom where they put their parcels for delivery. I went and laid there and went to sleep.

Kirit

We let Kumar sleep off on the sofa. We sat at the counter and chatted. I asked Tony how he got his job. He said his sister is working at another branch and she recommended him. He talks with slang and a low tone. I said you should be in Marketing. He said he did not have a degree. What did you study, I asked. He said 10th pass. I asked him are you married? He said yes, but we are not staying together. She lives with her parents. I asked Why did you get separated? She says I am not earning enough. Everything for her is not enough. She would fight every day. So, I shouted at her to get lost, she went away to her parents.

I looked at Mahira, what is her take on all this. She just shrugged her shoulders, as if she is not interested in all this. I looked at Tony and then at Mahira, it seemed something is brewing between them. Then I thought it is none of my business what she does. I should not get into any one's personal business. The phone on the counter rang. He lifted the receiver and said hello in a low tone. His demeanour changed when he answered the phone. I thought this is the way

he speaks with customers. Mahira and I were chatting about our past hotel. Tony must have spoken for about half an hour. I asked who is it you are speaking for so long, Your girlfriend? He said no, it is a wrong number. I thought if he speaks for half an hour for a wrong number, how long would he speak for a correct number. He said you are talking about a hotel, what happened. She said Kumar's wife had a fire accident in the hotel and workers are scared to work at night. They were saying some ghost killed her. I am taken aback by her words, this is the first time I am hearing of a ghost. I said what ghost? She said it is just a rumour for the workers to avoid work. I asked if they did really see someone in the night? Then it would be murder, who would murder her? Mahira said Kumar said she had some problems with her family. They took her away at his sister's marriage and she came back after a year. Would they do such a thing? There is no honour in these matters. They both were from different castes and her family did not approve of him. They took her away when Kumar came to Bombay for the summer holidays. He waited until she reached 18 and eloped with her and married. They had not approved of this marriage and tried to hurt him after the marriage, he was saved by the owners of the building he was staying. Then fearing for them he came to Bombay.

I said then I met him on a local train and took him with me to a client. Seeing him handling the client I offered him my assistant post. From that time, he was working with me. He has been with me through thick and thin. He has helped me a lot. Because of him, we got out of a tricky situation with some cheaters, indicating Mahira and me. Tony asked he helped you both out of the situation, how? Mahira said when Kirit was taken to the Police station, he came with a lawyer and got him out without any fuss and then came back to enquire. Then I went to his room and told him about them. He brought me from there in the middle of the night to Bombay. If he had not brought me that day, I fear what would have happened to me. I was forever indebted to him. My family did not let me go out for six months after that. They were scared to let me go out, else someone will come and kidnap me. Tony asked so he is dear to you both? Yes, we replied. He must be a good man at heart. He would give his life for others, I said. Mahira agreed with me. At first, he had reservations about me, I about him. I used to think he did not like me. I said he thought you were there to cheat us. he would warn me about you. But as time passed he changed his opinion about you. That must be after you asked me to get an advance for the order before taking up the order for the fire extinguishers. Mahira said that time I was not sure about them, that is the reason I told you to collect advance first.

Tony said you three seemed to have a history between yourselves. Mahira said we were together for what four or five years. We have seen ups and downs during these years. Tony said we were discussing Hotel and we went on a detour. Because of his wife's death, you sold the hotel. I said we got a good offer from a five-star hotel, we took the money and saved ourselves. Otherwise, we might have had to close the hotel for non-cooperation from workers to work in the night. We had good business in the nights. Lots of travellers used to come to sleep there. Our dormitory used to be full with travellers. When dormitory filled they used to take rooms. We had a roaring business, but all that came down with the death of his wife. She was not at first not working with us, I asked him to get an extra hand and he sent her to help us out. It turned out this way. I feel sorry for him, he sent her to help us out and he became helpless. He loved her very much. He had endured a lot for her. We kept silent for some time. The phone rang and Tony picked up and start talking on the phone. Mahira and I kept looking at each other. I got up and went to the back room and looked at Kumar. He is snoring. I thought he is in heavy sleep, not to disturb him and came out. Mahira asked, how is he? I said he is sound asleep. Sahithi was telling me he was not sleeping much, he gets up in the night and sits at the dining table with a cup of tea. He doesn't sleep much. Mahira asked so you are letting him sleep? I said yes.

Tony finished his talking on the phone and set down the receiver. Mahira looked at him, he said the same wrong number. She laughed and said you talk on wrong numbers for so long. When will the customers call? He said we don't get customers' calls much. She said this way no customer calls will come. He smiled and let the matter ride. I looked at Mahira, she gave me her card and said this is the branch phone number. I give this card to the customers when I visit them, if they call on this number for a pickup what happens? Tony said then they will call the HO CC and they will take the details and route it to us. I asked you also have a customer care centre? She replied they recently started customer care. They are making lots of changes at the HO. They have appointed around four girls for CC.

Tony said I have seen them, they took good looking girls for CC. I asked who else they took for Marketing. Another four or five girls they took, some they will be transferring to other branches. I asked are they any good? Some are good, we will know in a month's time, who is good and who is not. I asked really what do you sell. She said we sell service. We ask them to send their documents and parcels through courier and we give them discounted prices for regular customers. Some people come and give for cash at this counter, we charge

them full price. Sometimes we go and collect from customers for cash also. Mostly we collect for international cash customers. I asked how much daily cash you get? Tony said from rs.500 to two, three thousand, if we get international parcels. Once we got a 400 kg parcel for an international destination. We called a van from the HO for collecting them. It was raining that day and we reached HO at around 9:30 pm. Sometimes we can't maintain timings for our work. We have another two boys and we adjust work and timings. One boy goes to HO in the morning and collects parcels for delivery. If it is heavy parcels, they will be dropped here by the van and we have to deliver from here. Then one of the boys will take them to the customer as per route. I asked how the boys go to the customer? He said by bus or local train. I asked You don't have any vehicle? Tony replied none of us have. One or two people in the HO has vehicles. You know Rajesh used to be a courier boy, he used to deliver on his car. Then the BM has taken him over as Marketing Executive. Now they use his car to meet the clients.

Seeing Kumar getting up in the backroom, I went over to him and asked him shall we go home? He said let us go. We took an auto and I dropped him first and went home.

Kumar

After a long time, I had good sleep. I heard the voices from the office room, could not remember what they were talking.

Kirit left me at home, I opened the door and sat down on the sofa. Hearing the sound of the door, Chitti came out from the room, she is the girl mother sent over to look after the children. She asked me, Anna, do you want water? I said no, where is Sahithi? She replied She is sleeping in her room shall I wake her. I said let her sleep, give me a cup of tea. She went over to the kitchen. I went over and looked at the kids. I felt pity for them. How much they are missing their mom? Can Sahithi look after them like their mother? Does she love them like their mother? How Chitti is looking after them? She came looking for me with a cup in her hand. She handed me the cup and said they are sleeping. They will wake up in an hour's time. I will bring them to you then. I said ok and got up and left the room with my cup. I used to smoke in my room previously, now I had to go outside to smoke. I finished my tea and went down to smoke. I came back and went into the bedroom and changed into a nightdress and sat on the bed. I looked at Sahithi. I felt a feeling of love raise in my heart and kissed her on the forehead. She moved a little and went back to sleep. I sat there and thought what happened to me? The one love I had was lost. What is the relation

between us, is it love? At least from her side, it seems to be love, otherwise, no one will do what she has done. She has brought me from the dump and put me here. I owe her my life. At least for her sake, I have to become normal and look after her and the kids. I can't become complacent with myself thinking about Sneha and her death. I have to act appropriately with the kids and their welfare. They have that many expectations from me.

I went to the hall and sat down on the sofa, switching on the tv.

Sahithi

I heard the door opening and Kumar speaking with Chitti. But I could not open my eyes due to sleep. I went back to sleep. I felt him sitting on the bed and kissing me on the forehead. Then he got up and went and switched on the tv. With difficulty, I opened my eyes, went over to the bathroom, washed my face and came out. Kumar sat there watching tv, I went there and sat beside him. He looked at me and said I love you. I thought when he last said the words. Did he ever say those words? I could not remember when he last said them. He said I am sorry if I hurt you any time. You are my lifeline, I can't live without you. Please don't leave me anytime. If you leave me I can't live anymore. You have been my support and my life. He put his head on my lap and started crying. I thought what brought this rush of emotions in him? He was normal when he left home. What they said to him at the party. Whatever happened, he seems to return to normal with his words. He would come back to me from his world and he would forget Sneha. I kept rubbing his head. After crying his heart out he got up and went to the bathroom washed his face and came out. He seemed fresh as if his mental clouds have dispersed. I thought if he came to know what I have done, what would be his reaction?

Kumar

I felt relieved after saying sorry to Sahithi. I have ignored her for all these days. After Sneha came over, I could not give her enough time and I felt really guilty for what I have put her through. She had really endured so much for me. When Sneha left me, she brought back me to normal. Then again when Sneha met with the accident, if she had not been there, what would have happened to me? I could not imagine. She stood by me all these times. Now she is looking after my kids as her own. I let my thoughts fly and absentmindedly looking at the tv.

Kirit

Mahira called me to her house, she asked me to take her to some customers. I thought I would spend some time with her and see how she is handling the clients firsthand. I took my bike and reached her house. She was standing on her balcony. Seeing me she came down and got in behind me and told me to go. I asked where? She said I will give directions, first start driving. We came out the gate, she said go right. I crossed over to and drove right.

She took me to a company at Chakala. She went and offered the services of their company. She said they will give 25 per cent in Domestic and 10 per cent in International prices as discounts. They tried to haggle for a discount, she said she could go for 30 per cent in Domestic and she can't go any extra discount for International parcels. They agreed to her proposal and she gave them the signed contract with discounts mentioned and they signed and gave her back. She gave them their copy and we came out. After that, she took me to their HO. There is a counter in a room in front of the gate and there is a small door beside that. She said the counter is for the branch where they collect courier for walk-in clients. The other door is for the Operations room for HO. We went through the main door and she told me to sit on a chair and went behind the counter. I looked at the people sitting behind the counter. There is a girl about five feet with a round face and looked catholic and catholic girl who is tall about five feet six inches. Both the girls were pretty and one guy also sitting there. He is small and thin he also looked catholic. I thought this company employee mostly Catholics for the customer service. There is a table and chair inside the room far behind, there another man is sitting. She took the signed contract and handed it to him. He saw the company name and asked her something and she replied to him. She came over to me and I asked who are all these people. She said they collect the parcels from walk-ins and give them receipts and collect cash. She introduced each one the tall girl is Diandra, the short girl is Sandy and the short fellow is Melwyn. I said pleased to meet you all to each one. She said to them he is Kirit, he runs a packing manufacturing company. In the meantime, a guy came with a parcel and asked them do you have service for this area. To check the availability of the service the tall girl took a heavy book from under the counter and started going through it. At last, she said we don't seem to have a service there. Let me check with the operations. She went inside and came after 2 minutes and said we have service there and took the parcel and checked the contents and made receipt and collected the money. I asked is this difficult to send parcels? She said no, sometimes we don't know if the service is available for interior areas, then we have to check before accepting the parcel. Otherwise, if it is returned undelivered, we will be in a problem. At present we have services for major cities only.

We both came out and she said to drop her at the Andheri station. I took her to Andheri, she stopped at her regular restaurant. I parked the bike and went with her inside. There were some of her friends sitting there and she went and sat there with them. I also went and sat with them. I looked around the people at the table Chowdary, Salim and charsi Rakesh. I thought she is back with Rakesh. Now how he will influence her. I got up and went out and brought two fags and gave her one and lit one. I looked at Mahira she was her bubbly self with her gang. Finishing my fag, I said I will take leave and came out and went home.

Kumar

It was one week from the time party with Mahira, my relation with Sahithi became normal again. We went back to the time before Sneha came back into our life. The only difference now is the kids. We came back home and she went inside to change. I took the kids and sat on the sofa. I sat them on both sides of me. I thought of what happened with Sneha, how she could leave and go away. Why did she leave at this young age? What really happened that day? She needs to do only supervision, what is she doing in the kitchen at such late hours. What did I hear from Kirit and Mahira talking about ghosts? Is it in my dream or did they were really talking about ghosts? Did Sneha become a ghost? Is it the reason for them selling the hotel? Did someone see her ghost? What is this story of the ghost, I have to ask them? I made a mental note to speak to Kirit.

Seeing Sahithi coming out of the bathroom my mind went to Sahithi. Isn't she beautiful? Am I lucky to get such a girl in my life? What did I do to deserve her? She wore a nightdress and came and sat beside Reena. I looked at her and asked what did I do to deserve you? She questioned back what did I do to deserve you? I leaned over Reena and kissed Sahithi on the cheeks, then kissed Reena. Sahithi looked at me asked what for? I said for deserving me. She shook her head and said we deserve each other. And we deserve them indicating kids. I was happy she is including them in our family. I pulled both of them with each hand close. I thought what would Sneha think looking at this scene.

Chitti came out of the room, I asked her is the dinner ready? She said it is ready anna. I said then serve the dinner. She put the bowls on the table and called us. I said to her look after the kids I will come after dinner. We had dinner came and sat on the sofa and told her to go and have her dinner.

Mahira

Rakesh said he want us to be together again. He is ready to leave the drugs. I said let me think. Kirit seemed to have taken offence to his presence. He just had his fag and went away. He seemed angry at me. Let him be, is he any relation to me. What does he think about me? Sometimes I ask him for help, don't I have that much intimacy with him?

What about Tony, what he would feel about Rakesh. I have not got a chance to introduce Rakesh to him. I have to see his reaction. I will ask Rakesh to come and meet me at the Kandivali office.

Tony

I have been watching Mahira for the last 3 months. I could not understand her intentions. She would be close and far away at the same time. How is it possible for that? You only see that in Mahira. Sometimes she is so sweet and if you try to come closer to her she would act angry. Like that day at the party, I tried to put my hands around her shoulders, she threw my hands down, I could not see her face in the dim light. If she has no intention, why should she take us there and why should she sit beside me. Those bars are specially for this kind of act. I could never understand her.

Now she brought a guy Rakesh and introduced him as her boyfriend. It is her way of saying I have a boyfriend and you keep your hands to yourself. Who wants her she is not that much of a beauty. My sister in law is better looking than her. Maria, it is her name, I have had my eyes set on her from the time of my marriage. But she never gave an inch of space for manoeuvring. If I could lay my hands on her, I could show what Tony is made up of. It is my roving eyes the problem for my marriage. My wife went away to her parent's place, at least I get a chance to go and see Maria once in a while on the pretext of meeting her.

I have applied for a job in Saudi Arabia. If I could get a job there, my life would be fixed. I could work there for three or four years and can come back.

Our marriage anniversary is coming up how it would be to call the people and give a party? I should arrange a party at our house. I will call Mahira and her friends. Let us see how this goes.

Mahira

Tony is calling for his marriage anniversary. One side is telling he is estranged from her, another side is calling for their marriage anniversary party. As he got a job in Saudi he wants to get back to her. What is his idea, I could not

understand? I will call Kirit and Kumar for the party. I better keep Rakesh away from the party. He is just trying to get away from drugs, I should not tempt him with drinks. He also called the other two courier boys from the office. One is a Maharashtrian and another is Rajasthani.

Kirit

Mahira called us for Tony's anniversary party. I remember him saying he was married and he was not staying with her. Why is he giving the party for their anniversary? Tony is a funny person, what he does I could not understand. That day he was speaking with the wrong number for hours. I took Kumar with me and we went to Tony's place with Mahira. It seemed like a chawl but it was on the main road and it is not a small house. Tony introduced his wife, Peggy, she is around five feet three inches little stout and fair. She is working as a nurse in a hospital. I told Mahira he is lucky to get to marry her, why is he acting like that?

She replied I don't know, he must be having a roving eye, he acts like that only. He flirts with everyone, around him. I asked did he flirt with you? She replied yes, every time we are alone he flirts with me.

Tony brought three glasses of whisky and gave us. He said snacks are on that table, indicating a table full of eatables. We went put on the plates some eatables and came and sat outside on chairs placed there. The other two courier boys came and wished us and went inside. After five minutes those two came back with their glasses and plates and sat with us. Tony brought his wife's sister Maria and introduced her to us. we all shook hands with her and said glad to meet you. I looked her over She is around five feet five and Stout and not fat and fair. She looked beautiful than her sister. I felt a little twinge in my heart looking at her. There was something in her that made my heart flutter. I have not felt that way about any other girl other than possibly Dolly. Remembering Dolly made me a little sad. I reminiscences about the events with her. How she and her gang have tried to dupe me and due to intervention at the proper moment by Kumar has saved me and Mahira. I looked at Mahira and said looking at her I remembered Dolly. She said forget about her as a nightmare. Leave the story behind. I said seeing Maria, she reminded me of Dolly. I seem to have a liking for Maria. Can you get me to meet her again? Mahira said she will speak to her.

Tony sent us five more glasses of whisky. Each of us took one glass. Tony came and sat with us with a glass in his hand. He sat beside Mahira and whispered

something in her ear. Mahira said don't talk rubbish and turned her head away. I asked her what happened? She said nothing.

It is 12:30 by the time the party finished. Three of us took an auto and first I dropped Mahira and second, I got down at my home and Kumar went away to his house.

Kumar

I reached home around 1:30 am. I opened the door went inside, changed and lay on the bed. Sahithi stirred in her sleep and said you have come home. I said yes. She asked how is the party. I said it is okay. I slept off. I got up around 8 am and Sahithi already got up and bathing the children. I went into the kitchen and fixed myself a coffee. I came out of the kitchen and sat on the sofa. After bathing the children, Sahithi brought them and sat them at my side. I kissed them and held them close. Whenever I hold them I remember Sneha. I remembered the time I spent with Sneha from the time I saw her from my terrace and our interactions at the clinic and college. Our going and coming together from home and college. Then when I found she was sent away and I had to join a college in Hyderabad instead of Bombay. I waited for her to become a major before eloping with her. I married and waited for completing my studies before coming to Bombay. The major incident is her going away with her cousin believing lies. Here her grandparents have made a brilliant move when other things have failed. But they could not make her forget me when she became pregnant. When their lies have come in front of her, she forced her cousin to bring her back to Bombay. But the circumstances have changed and she died in an accident. How could she do such a thing?

Sahithi came and sat beside and switched on tv. She asked what are you doing sitting here? I said Nothing. Just thinking about kids. They are without their mother. Sahithi said what are you talking about, I am their mother, don't forget that. I look at them like my own kids. I don't feel they are Sneha's children. They are my own. She caught hold of Atul and pulled him to her. I looked into her eyes, there is honesty in her eyes. She was not bluffing when she said they are my kids. She with her whole heart believes they are her children only. I heaved a sigh of relief. I don't have to worry about them. She would look after them under any circumstances. I pulled her close and hugged her. The distance between us created by Sneha's return started to close down. She called Chitti and said to look after the kids and took me inside the bedroom.

Kirit

Mahira called me to her Kandivali branch on Tuesday around 11 am. I said I will be there. I went there by 10:30 am. She sat me at the counter. I asked where is Tony. She said he went for a pickup. I asked what's the matter? She said Maria said she will come here by 11 am. I said Oh, is she coming to meet me? She said yes, she wants to meet you. At 11 she took me to the bar and restaurant near the station where she gave us the party. She told me to go in wait for them. After possibly 10 minutes they both came in and Mahira sat opposite me and Maria sat beside me. I turned to Maria and said hello. She said hello, you wanted to speak to me. I said that day at Tony's house I saw you and felt something in my heart and I want to speak to you from that time. Maria said then speak to me. I said when you ask like that I don't know what to speak. She kissed me on the cheek and said now tell me what you want to tell me. I became speechless by her action. I sat there like a motionless rock. She put her hand on my shoulder and shook me. I came out of the trance and turned towards her and kissed her on the cheek and said I love you. She said give me some time. Let Tony go to Saudi and then we will talk. I asked is Tony going to Saudi? Mahira said the date is fixed for after 15 days. I asked do you fear Tony? Maria said it is not fear, I don't want him to interfere in my life. However, he is going away in 15 days, so I think I will take any decision after he goes away.

We ordered lunch and waited for the food to arrive. I asked Mahira how is the work going? Did you get any new customers? She replied we are getting new customers. We are getting calls for collecting packages from the customers we visited. Yesterday only we received a call from a customer saying he wants to send Ayurvedic medicines abroad. How much they could be one or two kilos? She said not one or two kilos, it is 400 kilos. I asked 400 kilos? Yes, she said. I asked how much billing could be? She replied it would be based on the area they are sending, at conservative estimates it could be around 2 lakhs rupees. Is it a good billing I asked? She replied it is for a single overseas consignment. My hard work is paying off. The waiter brought the food and put it on the table. I asked what is what? He explained each item, we could not see what is in front of us. So, we asked the waiter to serve us on the plate. With difficulty, we peeled our eyes and eat what is on our plates. We finished our lunch and got up paid the bill and came out. First Maria went over to the station to catch a train. We came after 5 minutes and went to the office. We went and sat at the counter. I asked Mahira does that mean Maria agreed to my proposal. Mahira said it seems so, she is only asking for some time until Tony goes to Saudi. She does not want Tony to know about her relationships. I said it seems so. Let us meet after Tony goes to Saudi. I came out of the office and took my bike and reached our factory. I went in and told Kumar the details of my meeting with

Mahira and Maria. He listened attentively and said what is the final outcome? I said she is asking for 15 days' time until Tony goes to Saudi. Why wait he asked? I said I think there are some problems between them, she is fearing him and could not say it openly. He thought for a minute and said when I saw him I felt there is something wrong with him. He is not the kind of guy he shows himself to be. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. I said that is the correct word for him. let us wait for tony to go to Saudi.

Kumar

Who is this Tony and what is his story? Why does Kirit brings up him in his conversations? Now Kirit is interested in Maria. He had bad experiences with Dolly, did he need to get into trouble with another girl? I have to check out this girl. Otherwise what problem I may have to get him out of? I mentally noted to meet her and see what she is made of.

When he went to check the shop floor I rang Mahira and asked her who is this Maria. She said she is Tony's sister-in-law, Tony's wife Peggy's sister. I said I want to meet her once. She asked why are you interested in Maria? I am concerned about Kirit, after the incident with Dolly I want to thoroughly know his interests. I can't go through another Nasik. I was lucky that time, I could gather some information and you have helped us at the last minute. She said ok I will arrange for you to meet her but it would be better to wait for Tony to go to Saudi. She was concerned about Tony interfering in her affairs. I said then it is better I get to meet her before that. I said to Mahira and asked her to call Maria and come and meet me at Dadar station that would be ideal for both of us and there would be no chance of Tony finding out about our meeting. She called Maria and said she is ready to meet me at the time and place specified. I went to Dadar and waited at the place specified. She came after 15 minutes. I asked her directly what is her problem with Tony. She told me he tried to rape her and knowing that her sister had gone away to their parent's place. That is the reason for their quarrels. At the anniversary party, she was reluctant to attend, and knowing that he will go to Saudi her parents had asked to attend the party. That is the reason for also attending the party reluctantly. I asked what action you want to take? She replied at present she doesn't want to take any action as he will go away to Saudi and they will rid of him for at least three or four years. After he leaves India we want to file divorce proceedings. He could not attend and the case will be decided in his absence. I said the best way to deal with is that to file the case in court and let him sign the petition. He will not further attend the proceedings and it will be decided in your favour. At least let him

know your sister is filing for divorce. This way he can't deny not knowing later and get the proceedings cancelled. She said she will advise her sister about this. I said if you want to raise a complaint against Tony I will help you on that matter. She said I don't want any trouble from him again, if his travel plans get cancelled he will keep it in his mind and try to take revenge, it is better to let him go away. By the time he returns we can decide what to do. I said if it is your final decision I will abide by it, please let me know if you face any problem at any time and I wrote my office and Home telephone numbers and gave it to her. Go home and don't worry about him we will make sure he goes away to Saudi without troubling you or your family. I put her on the local train and caught myself a train and reached the station. From the parking, I picked up my scooter and reached factory. Kirit sitting at his table and checking something. Seeing me coming in he asked where you disappeared. I said I went to meet Maria. He asked surprised Maria, why? I thought she was in some sort of trouble with Tony and I got Mahira to arrange a meeting and went and met her. Kirit asked what did she say? Tony tried to rape her once and her sister intervened and she went away to stay at her parent's place. Maria was scared of Tony and did not take any action. I asked her to take some action and she said however he was going away to Saudi they will file for divorce and they will try to get rid of him. Kirit said ok, did you ask her about me? I said I did not speak to her about you, I advised them to file for the divorce before he goes away at the last minute so he will not have any chance of refusing to sign. This way they can corner him signing the divorce. Kirit said so finally they will rid of him. I said yes, good riddance. I gave her my numbers to call on any matter.

I got a call from Maria at home. I looked at the time it is around 8 pm. I asked is there any problem? She said her sister went to Tony's house with the divorce papers for him to sign. He seemed drunk and was making a scene. I said we are coming now. I called Kirit and said to him to rush to Tony's house and I am on my way. I took the scooter and rushed to Tony's place. By the time I reached Kirit was already there. We went in and cooled Tony and explained to him don't be a fool and if you make a ruckus you will lose the opportunity to go to Saudi tomorrow. If you lose this opportunity you can never go again. Think about your future. Sign the divorce papers peacefully, you can go tomorrow else if you decline to sign these papers they will lodge a police complaint and you can't catch the flight tomorrow. If you sign them then the court will wait for you to appear and then only they can decide about the divorce. So, until you return they can't decide on the divorce, you will be a winner in both counts. At last, after persuading he agreed to sign the papers. He signed the papers and handed

them over to Peggy and they went away. Tony asked us to join the party as a farewell party. We each had a peg and went away.

Kirit

We all went to give farewell to Tony only to confirm he is really taking the flight. When the flight took off we came out took a breather. I congratulated Maria and said you have got rid of Tony, are you happy now. She said I am happy. I asked her what did you think of my proposal? She said give me some time. I have to think it over. I will call you when I'm ready and went away. I looked at Kumar, he said to give her time as she asked.

We went to the factory and sat on our chairs. I asked will she ever answer my question. He said I doubt she will reply to you in near future. I said I also felt the same. He said give her some time if she had any feelings for you she will return to you else in due course you try to forget her. I went into overdrive thinking about what to do.

Chapter 2

The year 1990

Kumar

It is Atul and Reena's third birthday. We celebrated at our house and invited both our families and some friends. Kirit asked to call Maria also. He did not get any answer from her till now.

We got a cake for both of them and arranged for snacks for the friends and dinner for family members. After Sneha's accident, Sahithi informed her parents about the kids and she informed them that they became motherless and she is looking after them. She convinced them to accept them as her children. So, they have come to see them and attend the party. I have arranged for my friends' party on the terrace. I told them after the cake cutting they can go and have the drinks party on the terrace. Sahithi prepared the children with the help of Chitti and sat them on two chairs before the cake table. After blowing candles she caught both of their hands and cut the cake. She fed them small pieces and told Chitti to cut the cake and give the guests.

Some of the guests who wanted to have drinks have gone to the terrace. Some guests had snacks and left. Some waited for the dinner to be arranged. My mother spoke to Sahithi's mother and explained the circumstances under which the kids were rendered motherless. They showed sympathy and extolled the virtue of Sahithi to look after them. My mother agreed with them and said she looks after them like her own. They sat down and chatted and started getting close.

My mother spoke in Hindi and her mother is speaking in Marathi. They both can understand each other. It is a sight to watch them talking with each other.

I went to the terrace to see how the party is going on. My father and Sahithi's father had one glass each and chatting with each other. My brother sat on a chair chatting with someone. On one side Kirit and Mahira were chatting. I went and asked Mahira, Maria did not come? She replied no, I called her but she said she was out of the station, it seems to be some kind of excuse. Kirit said I also feel the same. I said it is better forgetting her for some time. Don't try to approach her and send any kind of messages to her. Mahira said Kumar is correct, for the time being, forget her. I asked Mahira where is your boyfriend. She said I don't call him to parties. I said oh, I remember.

I went to my father and father in law and asked them do they need anything. They said they are comfortable with their drinks. I went to Sahithi's brother in law and asked how is he doing? He said he is fine. I asked him did you meet my brother? He said yes. I looked at my brother. He was facing us and he is speaking with a lady whose head I can see. Seeing me he called me to come. I went to him and looked at him. He said meet Sunitha, she is friends with our cousin Sunaina from Madras. I turned and looked at her she is very beautiful. I said to her glad to meet you. Are you from Madras? She said I am from Bombay only, we are basically from Madras. I asked are you working. She said I am working as an air hostess. I said I thought so. You could only be an air hostess. There is something in you that says you could be an air hostess. She asked is it so?

I said to Sunitha come and meet our father, he is standing there. Three of us and went to where father and father in law were standing. I said daddy meet Sunitha, she is friends with Sunaina. He asked her oh, you are friends with Sunaina? How do you know her? She said in Madras, she was our neighbour to our sister. After marriage, my sister shifted to Madras with her husband. He asked so your sister stays at Saidabad? They have recently constructed a house there and we went to their house warming ceremony. When I met her last time I was in Madras, knowing I am from Bombay, she gave me your details and told me to meet you. When I called your house, your brother told me that we are going to a birthday party and told me to come and meet us here. I let them chat and went down to the flat. Sahithi is making arrangements for dinner. Some guests have left after having snacks and dinner guests are only left. I arranged the dishes on the dining table. I called my mother, mother in law and some guests to the dinner table to have dinner.

I went and sat with the sleeping kids. Chitti is helping Sahithi with the serving for dinner. My thoughts went to Sunitha. I felt I have seen her somewhere. Must have seen her when we went to give a sendoff to Tony. Because of her uniform, I might not have recognized her at the party. Kirit and Mahira came down searching for me. They brought a bottle with them. Kirit poured us drinks gave me one. Mahira asked me what are you doing alone here. I said just looking after the kids. They both are busy serving dinner. We sat and chatting completed the bottle they brought. I said let us go and have dinner. We went into the dining room. Almost all the guests here have finished their dinner. Those at the terrace party are yet to have dinner. I asked Sahithi have our dads had their dinner? She replied no, they said they will come down in half an hour.

I said please serve us. We sat down and had our dinner. After finishing I said I will go to the terrace and send our dads down for dinner. She said ok, do that.

I went to the terrace and told dad and father in law to go have dinner. Then I went to my brother and Sunitha told them to go and have dinner. She smiled and said going, and said to my brother come for dinner. Seeing her smile, I thought what a dazzling smile she had. I kept my eyes on her till she went down. I turned to Kirit and said she is friends with my cousin. He said what a pretty girl. I said she is an air hostess. Mahira said is it so? My sister might know her. My sister is working as an on-ground staff. After their dinner, I will speak to her.

Kirit brought out a packet of fags. I said we will go behind the water tank. We three of us went behind the water tank and lit the fag started smoking. After finishing the fags, we came and sat on the chairs placed around. Sunitha and my brother came up to the terrace. I asked them did you have your dinner? Sunitha replied we had. Mahira called Sunitha, come and sit here. She came and sat beside Mahira on a chair. My sister Farida works on the ground staff. Did you meet her? Sunitha said Farida, thought a moment and said tall little fat girl works at the counter. Mahira said yes. Sunitha said I know her she helped me when I joined. I let them talk and went down. Father said we finished our dinner, we will go home. I said stay over the night, why go at this hour. You can sleep in our room or in the children room and father in law and mother in law can sleep in the other room. They said ok.

I arranged extra sleeping arrangements, went to the terrace. I asked Kirit why don't you stay the night, I will arrange something in the hall. I will arrange the sleeping for you all and call you. I went down arranged whatever available bedsheets or mattresses and went to the terrace and called them. Kirit, Mahira, Sunitha and my brother all came down and sat around and started chatting, telling each other's stories. Mahira asked my brother why aren't you married till now. He said my brother had a problem and he eloped and married. I have not found the girl I like. I might find someone I like, looking at Sunitha. I thought he had set his eyes on Sunitha. She is a very beautiful girl, working as an air hostess and must be earning a good income. If she agrees they make a good pair. Mahira must have caught the hidden meaning in his words. She looked at Sunitha and asked what kind of guy do you want to marry? She said I did not think about marriage, I will go with whom my family chooses. I thought she is indicating that she did not have a boyfriend. If she goes by whoever her family chooses means, she is indicating to approach their family. Did Sunaina send her to our family to fix their alliance? my brother had an electronics business and I don't know what he earns, must be substantial. I waited for someone to ask

what my brother does. No one raised the point and the discussion went on to some other point. Sahithi came and sat there finishing her kitchen work. She asked what is going on? I have introduced Sunitha as our cousin's friend who works as an air hostess. She said hello to Sunitha. You seemed familiar, I have seen you somewhere. Where do you stay? Sunitha said Andheri west. Sahithi thought for a minute and said there is no way I would have seen you there. Which college did you go to? Sunitha said Mithibai. Sahithi said I have not been there, where could I have seen you there? I have not flown anytime. In the meantime, Atul must have woken up in his sleep and come out of the room crying. Sahithi picked him up and tried to put him to sleep. Sunitha asked whose child is he? Sunitha said Kumar's. Sunitha looked surprised why are you saying Kumar's, you could have said ours? Sahithi said he is really Kumar's son, he was born to his first wife. Sunitha seemed surprised are you his second wife? Sahithi replied yes. Sunitha asked what happened to his first wife? Sahithi said she died in a fire accident. Sunitha said sorry, in a fire accident? I said She was working with Kirit and Mahira in our hotel at Bombay central. One night she caught fire and did not survive. Sunitha asked how did she catch fire? Kirit interjected and said we really don't know, but other workers said it might be a ghost and were afraid to work in the nights after that. I asked what ghost are you talking about? Mahira said there was some talk about ghosts from the workers who were sleeping in the other staff quarters. Someone saw a ghost run away from the kitchen at the time of the fire accident. I said you are telling me all this now? Mahira said we thought it was all rumours. I asked who said they saw the ghost? Kirit replied it was Ramu Kaka and his wife. I asked where are they now? Mahira replied after we sold off the hotel, we gave them some money and they went back to their village. I thought I could have interviewed them if I had known about the ghost at that time, now it is not possible. Did you tell the police about this ghost? I asked. It was not known then replied Kirit. He told us later when he declined to work in the nights. That is the reason we had to close down the restaurant at nights. That is the reason we sold off the hotel when we got a good offer. I thought what is this story of ghosts coming out now? Is it really a ghost or someone else? If it is not a ghost, is it her enemies? Who could do such a thing? I have only questions and no answers.

Sunitha was looking at me with a concerned look on her face. I caught her eyes, she with her eyes said calm down. It has a magical effect on me, my boiling rage cooled down. I caught my head and looked at Sahithi. Her face was chalk white. I asked her what happened? She said a few days before the accident someone came to our house and rang the bell and asked about Sneha. I thought he was one of her patients who might be looking for a medical certificate told him that

she not living here anymore. He asked where she is living? I said at a hotel in Bombay central. I did not think at the time he would do such a thing. I asked do you think he did harm her? Sahithi replied I don't know, I don't think so. But after hearing about the ghost now I am thinking he could be the ghost. But why would he do such a thing I asked? She said he might be someone from her family. I said I don't think they would stoop to such a low level to kill her. Sahithi said I myself don't know, it just occurred to me after hearing about ghosts.

Now the chatting has taken a serious turn. Everyone tried to give their opinions about the incident. Someone said there are no ghosts. Someone said it is a murder committed by an unknown person. Someone said there could be a conspiracy behind it.

I am not hearing any of that, my mind is trying to unravel the incident. If it is her enemies, it could only mean it was someone from her family only. Is it the reason she was in the kitchen at that late hour? Is she trying to feed her assailant? If she trying to feed him means he must be known to her very well. Did he come there as a passenger from a rail or bus stand? Did he book a room and surprise her? Even if he has taken a room the records must have been destroyed. There is no way to find who it could be. I have to find out who it is. I have to find a way. I should take revenge on who did this to my Sneha. At this minute I have resolved to find her killers and take revenge on them.

Kirit

At last, the matter of the ghost and Sneha's accident came out in the open and came to Kumar's knowledge. Now he feels it is the act of his in-laws. He is hell-bent on taking revenge on them. He is correct in his thought process. No one else can do anything in this matter. Even if we go to the police, they would not act on this matter as they closed the case as accidental death. We all accepted this and took a pledge to help him take his revenge in whatever way he wants to take it.

Mahira

We have taken a pledge to help Kumar find his wife's killers and punish them. It might take time but we have resolved to do right by Kumar. I have doubts about her accident from the time of that incident. Is it someone trying to sabotage our business? It could be the hotel people who have brought the hotel from us. Is it them who created the story of the ghost? We have to think in this line also. I was told the land behind our hotel was brought by someone six months prior to

the accident. Did they create the accident? They would have tried to buy the hotel from us. No one has approached us for buying the hotel. If it is not them only another possibility is his in-laws. He told us how they have sent goondas to beat him up and he was rescued by the house owners, otherwise, he would be no more. The second time they have taken her away at his sister's marriage. How they told her lies to keep her at her grandparent's place. It was only when she learned the truth, she forced her cousin to bring her to Bombay. Is it their third attempt? But why the fire accident? Did they think they can get away by doing it? Or do they lose all hope of getting her back if it's what they want? Are they so cruel to do such a thing? Or is it someone else who is jealous of her relationship with Kumar? Is it her grandparents or someone else behind this whole charade?

Kumar

It is 8 am, I prepared coffee and woke one by one and gave them coffee. Kirit and Mahira said they want to discuss something about Sneha's accident. I said let everyone go away we will go and discuss at the factory. I called a cab and sent my family, Sahithi's parents caught an auto and went away. Kirit took Mahira and went to the factory, I took Sahithi to her office and went to the factory. We sat down on our chairs. Mahira sat before me on a chair. Mahira said let us discuss the accident. First, let us finalize it is a fire accident or is it murder if it is lit purposefully? The three of us concurred it is murder as we feel it is not an accident. Mahira said let us see who has an interest in her death. Her grandparents are angry with her and they want to humiliate you in this regard. By taking you away from you they took revenge on you for eloping with her. Second the owners of the hotel we sold to. It is my understanding they could have brought the land behind us and want to develop the hotel in place of our hotel. Third, it could be the landowner whose land was behind our hotel. To sell their land they could have done this to free our hotel for sale. Next, it could be the person who want to marry Sneha before you eloped with her. He must have been humiliated in his village when the girl he wanted to marry was snatched from him. They could have planned to kidnap her at your sister's marriage. Instead of she went with them willingly believing their lies. But when they found out she was pregnant and declined to abort he did not have any other option than to forget her. It seems he is the one who planned this whole thing about following you and Sneha and collected all the information about you.

I heard her attentively, she has analysed the situation very well. We have four targets in front of us to check. If it is the hotel owners they could have

approached us at least one time before taking any drastic action like that. They have not approached us, so we have to check with Kista Rao if he had any offers before we received the offer. We don't know anything about the original owner of the land behind our hotel. We never came across him. we did not have any interaction with him. thirdly Sneha's grandparents, I think no parent would like to see their children suffer in such a way, they rather would think I should suffer. The reason her parents left her at her grandparent's village is to marry her off to someone from her relatives. I suspect it is his whole planning. He might be the kind of person, who thinks if he could not get her no one else should get her. We have to concentrate on him. First, we have to inform her parents about her untimely death. We never informed her thinking they were not interested in her wellbeing. If they had any hand in her death, they would know and would not make a fuss about her death. Else they would accuse us of having her killed her or something like that. I told Kirit and Mahira the same and they concurred with me. We should inform them and see their reaction. We booked a call to Kista Rao and waited for the call to connect.

I called Sreenu at Vijayawada and told his brother to pass on a message to him. He said he will be available after 7 pm only. I said I will call at that time and cradled the receiver.

After some time, the call to Kista Rao came and we enquired if he had received any other offer before we offered to sell the hotel. He said if anyone offered to purchase it he would have taken the offer irrespective of our relationship. We were angry with his words but we let it ride. So, no one tried to purchase the hotel. So, it couldn't have been the hotel owners or the landowner. We decided to wait until we know of the reaction from her parents.

Kirit went to drop Mahira at her place and came back. We immersed ourselves in our work.

Mahira

Kirit taking me to drop me at home. I thought about the conversation with Kirit and Kumar. Kumar gave value to my thoughts and decided to take action on them. He must be treating me as one of them. Something should come out of this enquiry. Kumar's attitude towards me has changed from the time he met me after coming back from Nasik. Earlier he was not having confidence in me, he was thinking I came to them with the intent to cheat them. When he found that I was on their side he has changed his opinion of me.

Now we have to wait for his friend to come back. I asked him are there was anyone with whom he can send the message. He said his uncle would do.

He called his uncle at his shop and spoke to him to send someone to inform Sneha's parents of her accident. He said he will send one of his clerks working in his shop. He said to see their reaction to the news and inform us. We will call them after 1 hour.

We waited and after one hour called his uncle and he said that they were heartbroken and were cursing you for marrying her. Now it is confirmed her parents were not aware of her death. We have to find out about her grandparents.

Now, how to find about their involvement in the accident? We have brainstormed and the only way to know about them is to wait and see. It depends on her parents informing her grandparents.

The next action is to find out about the groom her grandparents fixed for her in the village. Kumar said Sneha's cousin could come in use for finding his details. We know his name and had one of his photos. We have to send someone to him to get the details. Who we can send is the question? Kumar can't go, he would be lynched if he enters their village. It has to be someone with authority. Let him think about who to send

Kirit

Some clarification has come in the matter of Sneha's accident. We have to think about what to do next. I can't go there as I don't know their language. We have to find someone to send there. I am ready to give Kumar whatever support he needs as his wife died in our care. From the time of her death I have a guilty conscience that we could not save her. Really what happened to her, her death is an accident or murder?

Sunitha

Everyone left the house and went on their work. I have a day off today, I am left with Chitti, who is looking after the kids. Seeing them I could not leave them and go home. So, I stayed back to give company to Chitti. I helped her in bathing the kids and readying them. I felt a satisfaction doing that which I never felt even in my job as an air hostess. Until now I don't know that raising kids could be this satisfying. I seem to be more connected to Reena than Atul. But seeing them I feel like they are my own children. This must be what Sahithi must be feeling.

She knew they are not her own kids, still, she treats them like her own. After feeding I put them to sleep and slept beside Reena. When I woke up it is 1 pm. I got up and freshened up and sat at their bed. Chitti came and called me for lunch. She served for me, I said come you also eat. She said she will eat later. I insisted she eats with me. Her cooking is excellent. She is from Andhra and I liked her cooking. I said to her if I marry, I will take her with me to my in-law's place. She shyly asked why? I said you are an excellent cook. I don't know who will cook in my in-law's place. She said Kumar's mother is also an excellent cook. I thought for a minute about what she is implying. Then it struck me that she is talking about Ram, Kumar's brother. She must have thought I am interested in him, as he was following me full time at the party. But do I like him? I don't feel a real connection to him. After spending a whole day, I couldn't understand him. I understand Kumar and his struggles. I feel a connection to him. But he was already married twice. I was told he was married to Sahithi when he was married to Sneha because she left him and went away. Still, I feel a connection to him. I understand him, his thoughts, his actions. When he was getting hyper when he thought Sneha's death was not an accident but murder, my one eye contract has calmed him down, as if he understands my look to calm down. What is this? I felt like I know him my whole life. This is the first time I met him and how is that possible. I felt like I should help him in resolving this issue he is facing. But how can I help him? He would not take my help.

I asked Chitti does she know their factory number. She showed the number noted on the dairy. He had noted all the emergency numbers for her to call. There were numbers for Kirit, Mahira, Kumar's Dad, his dad's office number, etc. Why there is no number for his brother? I called Kumar's factory number and Kirit took the call, I asked him can I speak with Kumar? He asked who is calling? I said Sunitha calling from his home. He asked are you at his house? Is there any problem? I said no problem, I stayed over because I have a free day I want to spend with the kids. He said is that so, here speak with him and gave the receiver to Kumar. Kumar said hello. I said Sunitha here, I called to say if you need any help with your matter, I am ready to help in any way. He said thanks, I will let you know. Bye, and cradled the receiver. I put down the receiver and thought would he take my help? I have to impress him to take my help. I will stay overnight and speak with him personally. Went over and sat with the kids.

Kumar

After consultation with Kirit and Mahira, I came to the conclusion that someone has to go to Sneha's grandparent's place to enquire about the details of the persons involved in Sneha's murder.

I picked up Sahithi and reached home. When Sunitha called she said she is at our house. What she is doing there? In our hurry to go to the factory we have not thought of Sunitha. We thought she would find her transportation. She must be feeling bored at her house. She must be missing her sister, who went over to Madras after marriage. Seeing all of us she felt she is missing her. We reached our flat and I opened the door and entered the hall. Sunitha came from the children's room. She must be spending time with the kids. She must like kids very much. I said hi. She said sorry I stayed over. I said don't worry, we will not punish you for this. She said I liked your kids very much, as I have a free day, I thought I would spend some time with the kids. I said it's ok, no need to give explanations. Do you want to have tea, we always have tea when we reach home? She said yes. I called Chitti to make 3 cups of tea. Chitti went to the kitchen to make tea. I went to the bathroom and freshened up and changed and came and sat on the sofa. Sahithi freshened and sat beside me. Sunitha sat on the side sofa. Chitti brought tea and placed it on the table. We took a cup each and started sipping.

I finished the tea and put down the cup and looked at Sunitha. She looked beautiful, in front of her Sahithi looked pale in comparison. I asked Sunitha, how are you feeling? She replied I am fine. I wanted to tell you, I wanted to help you in your quest for answers. I heard what you all discussed yesterday night. I understood the problem you are trying to address. I waited to see how I can help you in this matter. Please tell me what conclusion you have reached on this matter.

I said we have verified some facts of the case and we have concluded that it was not the owner of the land behind our hotel or who have purchased our land. Next, we verified with Sneha's parent's reaction. It seems they are not aware of her death. They have taken her death very badly and were cursing me.

So that leaves her grandparents or the person with who they have fixed her marriage. To find who is responsible we have to send someone to their village and find the details. Sunitha asked who you are thinking of sending there? I said that's what we are discussing, we did not find anyone to send. Sunitha said that's why I called to offer my help. Give me full details of the situation. I explained to her the full details of our story. She listened and sat thinking.

Sunitha

I listened to Kumar and Sneha's love story and how she died in an accident. I try to analyze what is the behind story in all this. Sneha is from a factionist family, but why they are vegetarians? Why it has become a problem point in accepting Kumar for them? So, to separate them they sent Sneha to her grandparent's village. So, instead of forgetting her, what does Kumar do? He went and brought her to Hyderabad and married her. When they tried to attack Kumar, his house owners had saved them. Then after completing his degree, he came over to Bombay. What did they do? They appointed a private detective to dig into Kumar's life. At Kumar's sister's marriage, they sent her cousin and by telling lies they took her to her grandparent's place. Where it was found she was pregnant and they forced her to get an abortion, which she refused. It must have put a dent in their plans to marry her to their choice of man. They must have left her alone after that. When she gave birth to the twins, she went to her parent's place, she came to know of their lies and with the help of her cousin came back to Bombay. Now here they were living happily until both the wives had a fight and to keep them divided he sent her to help in the hotel. Kumar thought with one stone he hit two birds. But what happened is she died in a fire accident. They have to find if it is an accident or murder. They eliminated two of the suspects. Another two are her grandparents and the person with who they fixed her marriage. Another thought struck my mind, is there someone else whom we are not aware of? Did she pick a fight with someone during her stay at the hotel? A tenant or a worker who might have some enmity with?

I asked Kumar did she had a fight with anyone at the hotel? Kumar said he is not aware of any fight. I thought we can't eliminate this possibility. First, let us eliminate her grandparents. I asked Kumar how can we check her grandparent's involvement? Kumar said one way is to catch hold of her cousin. He is the one who took her from my sister's marriage and he is the one who brought her back to Bombay. There is no one else who knows about her better than him.

I said give me some time, I will come up with a plan. They seemed to have no clue as to what to do, they have agreed to my proposal. Kumar said you take your own sweet time and come up with something.

Sahithi got up and went to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

Kumar switched on the tv and we started watching the program.

Kumar

After brainstorming with Sunitha, she has come up with some ideas. She said she will come with an idea and asked for time.

Sahithi came and announced dinner. I said to Sunitha come let us have dinner.

After finishing dinner Sunitha asked Sahithi did you prepare the dinner? Sahithi replied yes, how did you know? There is a taste difference between lunch and dinner. Lunch prepared by Chitti tasted south Indian. Dinner tasted different, so I thought you prepared dinner. Sahithi said I prepare dinner and Chitti helps me.

I went into the corridor for a fag. Sunitha looked out and went inside. We all sat down in front of the tv. I asked Sunitha what do you think of my brother? You both were together the whole time. Sunitha said I could not form any type of opinion about him. I could not seem to connect to him as I have connected with you. I could not put my finger on it. He seemed distant in his attitude like he wants to keep me away. I think he might be in love with someone. Maybe she is not reciprocating his advances or has rejected him. I don't know much about him, we were not that close I said. Sunitha said that I deduced from the phone book. I asked how? She said your phone book did not have a number for your brother. There would not be a number for him as he stays with my parents. If I had to speak to him, I had to call our house number only. She said why did I not think about that. I said sometimes we miss obvious. At that moment I thought I had missed something obvious. I could not place what I am missing, but it started to burrow into my mind.

Sunitha

My mind is set on solving the mystery. I cannot let go of any mystery. I am an avid reader. Especially mystery novels. When a mystery is in front of me, how can I let go of it? I got up and dialled our office and asked to give leave for a week as I have sprained my ankle and could not walk and the doctor advised a week's rest. They said they will pass on the message.

I came back and sat on the sofa and said now I have to get a doctor's certificate. Kumar said don't worry I can get you one now. He went and from the cupboard took out a pad and wrote and signed and stamped and gave me a certificate.

I asked how did you do it? Kumar said Sneha is an RMP doctor and she used to give medical certificates. But how could you give her certificates? I said I also used to work in a clinic, I taught everything and she got registered but I have not. Don't worry about that all, what is your plan. I said I am thinking of taking someone with me to their village and finding out about their history. He asked

Whom you will take with you? I said I think I will take your brother with me, we will spend some time together and we might connect. He said that is a good idea. Did you speak to him? I said that idea just struck me let me ask him. Where he would be? He said I think he would be at home. I said let me call and check. I got up and looked at the phone book and called his dad's number. His dad lifted the phone and said hello. I recognized his voice and said uncle, I am Sunitha. He said yes, tell me. I said is Ram there? He said he has not come home yet. I said when can you expect him? He said I am not sure, he comes home late. I said to tell him I called for him and call at Kumar's house when he comes. He asked are you still at Kumar's house? I said yes uncle, I will be here for some time. Please tell him to call me, it is something urgent. He said ok I will tell him if I see him coming or I will tell him in the morning. I said ok do that uncle, bye and cradled the receiver.

I told Kumar he is not home, we have to wait for him to call.

Sahithi

I thought Sunitha is interested in Kumar's brother, but here she is getting closer to Kumar. Am I jealous of her speaking to him? They are only planning to find out what happened to Sneha. Let him have that satisfaction. At least he is not blaming me for her death. Until he does not know the truth, I am safe.

Sunitha you sleep in the kid's room for tonight. We will speak tomorrow morning. She went to the kid's room. We went to our room. I asked Kumar what is happening? He said we were planning to find what happened to Sneha.

I thought let him do anything. What will he find? To support him this Sunitha wants to help him find the truth.

Chapter 3

Sunitha

I got up and brushed and came to the hall. Kumar gave me a cup of coffee. I asked him did his brother called him? He said no. I called his house number. His mother lifted the phone and when I asked to speak to Ram, she said he is still sleeping. I asked her to wake him and I want to speak to him. She went to wake him. Ram came to the phone and sleepily said hello. I said I am Sunitha speaking. He said tell me. I have some work with you, can you meet me at Kumar's house. He asked what time? I said any time I will be here. He said ok I will be there by 10 am. I cradled the receiver and came and sat on the sofa.

I said to Kumar he will be here by 10 am. He said ok, you plan your idea and let me know. I have to go to the factory and Sahithi has to go to the office. We will see you in the evening.

I have taken a dress from Sahithi and went and had a bath and readied myself.

Ram came around 9:45 am. I explained to him the situation and asked him will he help me? He asked what he needs to do? I explained to him we need to go to Sneha's village and get information relevant to her death. He said he will help me out. Let us plan this thing. I said we will go to Vijayawada first. There is Sreenu, Kumar's friend who had full information about her village and her grandparents. Then we will go to the nearest city to the village and set up our station. From there we will plan the action. Ram said let us do that.

Ram went away saying he had some work nearby and he will come later.

I went and looked at the kids, they were bathed and fed and were sleeping soundly. I sat down beside Reena stroking her hand. I thought what is my relationship with them. Why am I pining for them? What is the connection, which pulls me to them? Is that the reason I could not go to my house? Is it them for my decision to help Kumar. Is it because I want to stay close to them? I know they are not my children. But they are not Sahithi's either. She is only a caretaker, she did not give birth to them either. Did she feel about the kids as I feel for them? I don't think anyone else can feel the love and affection towards the children as I feel maybe except for their mother. What does that make me? I never thought about kids this way. I thought kids would come in my way of career. I thought I would think about kids after retiring from the air hostess job. Now I want to have kids. What is this magic? Do kids have this kind of pull? Why I am going berserk? I can't control my mind. I need to keep near the children. If I

go with Ram to Sneha's village, how would I feel about leaving the kids here? What should I do? How to control these feelings? Is there something wrong with me? I am not married yet, I am thinking of children. I laid beside Reena and went to slumber.

Chitti woke me up to have lunch. I looked at the watch it is showing 12:55. I said is it already 1. What did you prepare for lunch? Chitti said Sambar and bendi fry. I said let us go I am starving.

Having completed lunch, I sat down on the sofa switched on the tv. I watched tv for some time and then the doorbell rang. I went and opened the door, Ram standing outside. I said come in, did you have lunch? He said I had.

He came and sat on the sofa. How shall we go to Vijayawada? He said We will catch the train to Vijayawada. I have booked tickets for us after two days. From there we will see. I said will call Kumar and inform him. I called Kumar informed him about the course of action decided by us and told him about the tickets booked. He said ok I will speak with you after coming home.

Kumar

After reaching home I gave Sunitha all the details for Sreenu, his address, phone no. Sneha's grandparent's address and their closest station which is Tenali.

Sunitha said she will go home and prepare for the travel. She told Ram about her travel plans. Ram said he will drop her at her home and go home.

After three days Sunitha called. She said We went to Sreenu and he is now working as a station master at Tenali. I said good for him. She told me they went to Tenali and met Sreenu there. He said Sneha's cousin Suresh daily comes and catches a train here. What time is the train I asked him? Sreenu said around 11 am. We waited for him and caught him as he was about to catch the train. We stopped him and told him about Sneha's death due to a fire accident. He was heartbroken and wept uncontrollably. He was not aware of her death. He categorically said her grandparents have no hand in her death. We asked him about the person they fixed her marriage with. He said he does not have that kind of attitude and he is already married and has one son. He is not likely to take any kind of revenge on Sneha. The only thing he likes is her, and he would not hurt a fly.

I heard them out and said you may better come back to Bombay. It seems they don't have any hand in the accident.

Now I am in a quandary, if all of our suspects are cleared, who could do such a thing? Now we have to search for new suspects or declare it as a work of a ghost. Let us wait for Sunitha to come back we will have a meeting and discuss future plans.

After two days they came back to Bombay and my brother dropped her at our house and went away. I went down brought her bags with me. I asked her how is the trip. She replied it is good but even though we were together for a whole week I could not connect with your brother. His attitude is preventing me from getting closer to him. I think my deduction that his heart was broken by some girl must be true. He was so distant I could not reach him with my closeness. I think I will let him go his way.

I was disappointed that she will not be part of our family. I always thought of her as our family. I thought nothing is in my hands and let her make her own decisions.

I called Kirit and Mahira to our house for further consultations.

They arrived in one hour. Kirit picked her up from her home and came to my house. We sat around and I told them what Sunitha told me. They asked her for the details of the talk with Sneha's cousin. She told them the whole story again.

I said all of our suspects are cleared now. What should we do, close this case as an unknown person attacked her? Kirit said we can close like that, we will brainstorm again. Sahithi got up and went into the kitchen. She must be going to make dinner. She looked out of the kitchen asked all of you are staying for dinner? Mahira said she had to go back to her home for dinner. Kirit said he will have dinner and go. I said to Mahira you also have dinner and go and she agreed. Mahira called her home and informed them that she will have dinner and come. Kirit also informed her mother that he will have dinner at our house. Sunitha already informed her parents of her return and she will be staying at our house.

I went to the kitchen and asked Sahithi to make tea for us and came back and sat down. I said Now each of you tell your ideas about her death. Kirit asked what about ghosts. I said we have already ruled out the possibility. Next Mahira said someone staying at the hotel. I said we can't verify that as we don't have any records with us. Sunitha said it must be someone in her life, Like a patient. I said there is a possibility. But who could it be? I asked Kirit when you sent her items back there was no doctor certificates pad and her RMP rubber stamp with her things. Kirit said we sent whatever was found in her room. Sunitha asked

what is the use of those doctor certificate pads. It is used for giving certificates as I gave you one for getting leave. It can be used in courts also. Showing someone was ill or incapacitated to attend court. What about prescription pads Sunitha asked, did they return them? I said no, I have not found any prescription pads. Sunitha asked what these prescription pads can be used for. I said one can get medicines that will not be sold over the counter like sleeping pills. Sunitha asked can they be used to get some kind of drugs available in medical stores, like high-intensity pain killers? I said it is possible, I don't know about those medicines, as I am out of touch with these newly introduced medicines in the market. One of my colleagues had got one of those medicines in the black market. They were not available in the medical store without a prescription. I thought why anyone would murder her for a prescription pad or medical certificate pad? They could just ask her or they could steal from her. Why they would go to the lengths of killing her for them? There must be something behind this. I looked around, everyone seems thinking about our conversation.

Sahithi came and called for dinner. I got up and said let us go for dinner guys.

We silently had our dinner. Everyone is busy with their thoughts.

I picked a packet of fags called Kirit and Mahira. We went to the terrace and smoked and came back. We sat down and looked at each other. None had any ideas to share. Mahira and Kirit got up said they will go home now. I said we will speak tomorrow. They both left. I switched on tv and we sat watching tv.

After some time Sunitha said she will sleep with the kids and went to their bedroom. I switched off and we both went to our bedroom. Sahithi seemed tense, I asked her what happened, you seemed tense. She said nothing, all this talk about Sneha's accident brings back memories. I am not feeling well remembering all this. I said sleep it off. My mind is on who could have done it. I could not find a solution to the mystery. I lay on the bed looking up at the ceiling. My mind is swirling with the events of the days before her death. What is the relation between her death and missing things? Sahithi put her hands on my chest and she seemed gone into a deep sleep. Her rhythmic breathing seemed to have a calming effect on me, and I slipped into sleep.

I got up with a jolt as if someone tapped on my shoulder. I looked at Sahithi, she is sleeping facing the other side. There is no one else. I tried to remember why I woke up suddenly. Something is behind in my brain, I tried to remember, nothing came to my mind. I got up took a fag went into the veranda. I lit the fag and inhaled smoke. My mind is going at high speed. What is struck me in my sleep? I inhaled smoke and thought about what was going on in my mind when I

woke up. It seemed to move around in my head but is not coming in front of me. Suddenly I remembered once when I came home, Sneha was writing some prescriptions. There were no patients then. I asked her for whom you are writing prescriptions. She said some patient said he will come and pick the prescription first thing in the morning and I am writing his prescription. I said you could have written and could have given him. She said he had phoned for a prescription so she is keeping it ready. She put the pad and pen in the drawer of the table and locked it. It has not struck me then, why she locked the drawer. Who would go through the drawer? I snubbed the fag and went and looked in the drawer. It was unlocked and nothing important is present. That means whatever she placed there she must have removed it. Now another thought struck, what did she do with all the money she earned doing her work. I have not found any money on her at home or at the hotel. Previously I never went through her things that have been returned. Last time I only looked for prescription pads and rubber stamp. I went to her returned items bag and poured all the things on the floor. Only clothes were present. I found a zip on the side and opened it. There were some papers. Between the papers, there is a bank passbook and chequebook. I looked at the passbook entries, there was an amount of Rupees 1lakh 10thousand five hundred. How did she save so much money? I looked at the entries in the book on average she deposited an amount of rupees 10thousand per month. How did she get so much money? Could she earn that much just by giving medicines and certificates? My mind became numb thinking all this. I put the clothes back in the bag and put the cheque book and passbook in the cupboard. Went and lay on the bed. I could not go back to sleep, the amount of one lakh ten thousand five hundred was swirling in my mind.

Sahithi

I woke up in the middle of the night. I touched beside me, Kumar is not there. I looked into the hall light was burning. I got up and looked into the hall. Kumar is rummaging through Sneha's bag. What is he doing with that bag? What is he searching in it for? Now he is repacking the bag with the clothes. I came back to lay on the bed. He came and put something in the cupboard and lay on the bed.

I put my hand on his chest and went back to sleep. When I got up it is 7 am. I hurriedly adjusted the bedsheet and went to the bathroom. After brushing I came back, Kumar is not there, I thought he must have gone out for a fag and went into the kitchen and made a cup of coffee. By the time I returned to the hall, he is sitting on the sofa. I asked him do you want a cup indicating my cup of

coffee? He replied no, I just had. I did not question him about what is he doing in the early morning. He got up took a towel and went into the bathroom. I went into the bedroom and looked in the cupboard. Under some clothes, I found what I was looking for. It was Sneha bank passbook. I flicked through the pages and found on the last page the balance in her account. My eyes popped out looking at the figure. It is 1,10,500. How did she get such an amount? Did her parents or grandparents give her the cash? I checked through the cash deposits, she had deposited varying figures. If anyone gave her it would not be multiple deposits, it would be a single amount. Where did she get the amount? Hearing the bathroom door, I put back the passbook and took out a dress from the cupboard and stood aside as if I am picking my dress to wear. Kumar came in and looked at me and took out his dress from the cupboard. I picked the towel from the hook and went to the bathroom.

Where did she get such an amount? Absentmindedly I rubbed the soap on my body but my thoughts are on the balance on her passbook. After finishing the bath, came out and dressed. Came out to the hall, Chitti brought the breakfast in a serving bowl. I lifted the cover and looked inside, it is Idli, how they can have Idli daily? I put a couple of Idlies on my plate and put some chutney. She brought a small bowl of sambar and placed it in front of me. I dipped the Idli in Sambar and lifted it with a spoon. Whatever the food, Chitti is a good cook. She would make a good wife to some lucky boy. I know we can't get a better cook, it is her selection of items. Slowly I am getting accustomed to south Indian cooking. I thought while it lasts use her for my comfort. When she comes of age we have to find a suitable boy and marry her off. That is the agreement mom made with Chitti's family.

Kumar came and sat on the chair beside me. Chitti put a plate in front of him and he put Idlies in his plate and put a little chutney and started eating them. He likes Idlies, he says they are better than Dosas with oil. Something he watches is his eating, he tries to eat healthy food. After finishing my breakfast, I went and washed my hand in the washbasin. By the time I returned to the table Chitti brought a cup of tea and put it there for me. I sipped my tea went and brought my purse and sat on the sofa. After finishing his breakfast, he washed his hands went to the bedroom, I heard the sound of opening and closing of the cupboard. He came out with his bag and sat on the sofa. Chitti brought his cup of tea put it on the table. He picked the cup and started sipping it. I looked at him expecting him to say something. He must be in his own thoughts and did not utter a word. He put down the cup picked his bag and started walking out of the room. I picked my bag got up and went behind him. We started riding towards my

office. I thought he would stop in front of the bank where Sneha has her account. But he continued towards my office. He dropped me and went towards his office. So, he is not going towards the bank. Heaving a sigh of relief, I went inside the office.

Kumar

I did not know what to do with the passbook. I took it to show Kirit and Mahira. Mahira said she will come with Kirit to the factory. Being a marketing executive has its own perks. She can always say she is gone to meet some client. She did not have to report to her boss daily. She has to send daily reports of her activities only. Being the supervisor of the branch, her courier boys would cover her by saying she was here half an hour back, she went to meet a client. Her branch in charge Balachander had resigned and left Mahira as Supervisor.

I waited for them to come. They came after half an hour. Kirit complained that Mahira delayed coming. She did not finish her makeup. I am not hearing anything, my mind is on the money in her bank account. Mahira sat opposite me asked what is the matter. I showed her the bank passbook. She flipped through the book and when she reached the last page her eyes popped she exclaimed one lakh rupees. I nodded my head. She asked where did she get so much money? I shook my head and said I have no idea. She looked at the date of opening the account and said she must have opened the account after coming back. I nodded my head and said yes. She calculated the deposits and said it seems on average she put around 10 thousand for a month. How she could earn that much? What she was doing? I said All I know is she is treating patients and giving out medical certificates. She asked what she could earn from that? I said one or two thousand at most. She said if so where is she getting so much from? I said that is what I am worried If she could have caught up in something illegal, which led her to her demise. They all sat silent for a minute as if paying her respects. I looked from Mahira to Kirit and back. They must be thinking of ways to earn such an amount in a year's time.

I thought why she needs such an amount? Then it struck me after coming to Bombay with Sneha I thought of only thing is to save money to buy a house. What if it is her thought to buy us a house, she must be stifling to stay at Sahithi's house. She was staying there for my sake. She knew if we have to get out of Sahithi's house we have to go back to my father's quarters. When she came back we still had the small house, now it is a little different, they have shifted to a bigger house. But still, she must have thought we should have our own house. That must be her reason to try to save so much money. I have to

think from her perspective, she needed the money to get away from Sahithi. She was not comfortable staying in her house, staying with her. Even though she was my first wife and I married Sahithi when I felt Sneha would not return. She might not have felt the security living with her in her home. The sense of belonging was not there. She would have been happy in a rented house. Did I do something wrong by bringing her to live with Sahithi? Should I have left her with my parents? Have I been unreasonable with her? From the perspective of Sneha, I have not been a good, understanding husband. Did I push her to her death? I tried to help her and help our hotel by sending her there. It was not my mistake that she died in a fire accident. I can't blame myself for her death. I have to find the truth behind her death. That is the only way I can avenge her death, whatever means it has happened. I looked at Kirit and Mahira, they both were immersed in their thoughts.

Mahira

What can I do if I had one lakh rupees? I might invest in some business. But what happened to Sneha? That still is a mystery. We could not understand the head or tail of the mystery. What way she could earn so much money in a year's time? She must have done some business, or someone from her family must have given her the money. Would her family give her a monthly or lump sum? Is there a way to earn such an amount sitting at home? My mind is searching for ways to earn money sitting at home. You could earn commission getting buyers and sellers together. But the commission can't be earned for a long time. Will they try to remove middlemen if they have to pay commission regularly? It should be a type of business they don't want to know each other, they only want to do business with middlemen. Is it something illegal that she was doing? Everything comes back to what was she doing to earn so much money?

Sunitha

I got up and looked at the watch, it is after 9 am. How did I sleep so late? I came out of the room, Chitti asked shall I get you coffee Akka? I thought why she is calling me Akka and she calls Kumar anna. I chided Chitti to call me Bhabi. Chitti asked oh, like vadina? I said anything but not Akka. It feels like I am sister to your Kumar Anna. Chitti said ok, bhabi. I will get your coffee, go and brush your teeth. I went to the bathroom and came out after brushing and sat at the table. She put a cup of coffee in front of me. Chitti asked what do you feel about Ram Anna? I said I don't have any feelings for him. he seemed so distant. Even after spending one week with him, he still feels so distant from me. Chitti said when you said don't call me Akka, I thought you have some feelings for Ram Anna,

then why did you chide me for calling Akka. I replied it is not Ram, I feel something for your Kumar Anna. I feel like I know him from previous birth like I had some feelings for him then. Like he was my lover or husband or something like that. Then it struck me these are the feelings I am talking about, my feelings for Kumar. Is it true we feel about our relations of previous births? Could it be we were close during our previous birth? I looked at Chitti for her reaction. She was looking at me strangely. I thought she did not understand what I told her. Is it because of my feeling for Kumar, I could not get any feelings for Ram? Is it because of this I rejected Ram? I could not make up my mind. It seems I have rejected Ram when I looked at Kumar. Ram is better looking than Kumar, has better earnings than Kumar, he is three inches taller. What is it in Kumar pulling me to him? He has some kind of magnetism, which pulls people to him. See his friends, they are ready to do anything for him. To solve his problems, they are doing everything. Look at Kirit and Mahira they are always around him. Mahira must be working somewhere, but I always find her around Kumar. She was at his house, at the factory. What is his connection to them? Am I getting jealous of them? They are just friends, I am sure. Mahira is more times with Kirit than Kumar, they look as if they are a pair. From tomorrow I have to be back on duty. Can I leave this house and go away to stay with my parents? I have to come back saying I want to see the kids.

Kumar

I said to Kirit, will go to the bank and see about the account. I took the passbook and Sneha's death certificate and went to the bank and enquired about the status of the account. They said the nomination is in the name of Atul and Reena. I submitted the death certificate and gave it in writing to transfer the amount to a fixed deposit in the names of Atul and Reena to be available when they reach the age of 18. They said they will complete the formalities and let me have the certificates.

Now it seems she may not have the intention of purchasing a house rather she wants to secure the kid's future. Or there is a possibility of her thinking to buy a house. Putting in nomination means she did not want me to have the money in case of her death and she wants the money to go to the kids, to which I don't have any objection. I am only trying to understand her mindset. Which is her intention being the main concern, at least for me. Whatever it might be, I have to find the truth behind her death. Whatever I am trying it is becoming more mysterious. We are using the elimination process and we eliminated every possible suspect. Now we have to change our thinking process. Somewhere we

are missing something. Sunitha is having a detective mind, due to her ideas we have come this far in our elimination process. I have not informed her of my finding her bank account. I have to see her reaction to my finding the bank account. I have not seen her in the morning, she might go to her house by the time we return. Maybe she will give me a ring. I thought let me check if she is at home or not first. I rang up home, Chitti picked up the phone, I thought she might have left and asked did Sunitha went away? She said she is here, she is sleeping with the kids. I said ok, tell her to wait for me before going home. She said she will tell her. I cut the call and looked at Mahira. She asked are you checking Sunitha is at home? I said it is not that, I have not seen her in the morning, I have not told her about the passbook. I said forget about the case for now and concentrate on the work now. Mahira got up and asked can you drop me at Chakala. Kirit got up and said I will drop her off and come back. I said ok, I will hold the fort here. They both went away.

There is an order from our regular client, I noted it down and passed it to the shop floor. I immersed myself in work, I did not get time to think about anything else.

The phone rang and I lifted received and said hello. It is Sahithi on the other side, she asked me to pick her up a little earlier. I looked at the watch, it is showing 5:40 pm, I said I am leaving now. Took the scooter keys and went to pick her up. When we reached the home, Sunitha was up and playing with the children. Seeing us she said Chitti went to get groceries, would you like to have tea. I said please. She got up and went to the kitchen. I looked around the house was tip top in condition and clean. With Sunitha looking after the kids, Chitti must be having extra time to clean up. I sat down and asked Sahithi, what happened? She said I am fed up with the work. What I thought and what happened? From the time I was put on typing pool, everyone was asking me to do their work. Being the best has its disadvantages. I said then you ask the top manager to engage you on his rotation. If he did not agree, slowly put out a word you want to leave the company being fed up with the typing pool work. If it did not work, put down your papers, you can get a better job with your experience. For the time being, we can run our house with my income. We have some savings also. We got substantial payment from the sale of the hotel also, that also I put in a fixed deposit. You don't worry about the money. She asked You never worked anywhere else except the factory, where did you learn all this? I said I don't know it must be from my reading books or it could be natural.

Chitti came back from shopping. I asked her what did you bring? She said some groceries that were urgent. On the way back one man confronted me and was

asking about Sneha bhabhi. I asked what is he asking? He said where is she, not been seen for some time. I told him she died in a fire accident. He said sorry and went away. I thought he must be her past patient. What did he want from her?

Sahithi asked her what are you preparing for dinner? Chitti said let me see and went into the kitchen. I removed the passbook and showed it to Sunitha, what do you make of it? She looked through the book and looked at the last balance and said she is depositing cash throughout the year and the balance is above 1 lakh. I said I was thinking where did she get the money? Sunitha's first reaction was she must be doing some business. Some ladies sit at home and do clothes business. They give clothes on instalments. I asked if she did where are the clothes? She said that is out of the question. Then what kind of business she might be doing? Rice business? Import from Andhra and sell it here. Andhra rice is very popular here. I said I don't think of that possibility. She said maybe her parents are sending her the money. I said that possibility we can't ignore. But how to find out if they are sending her money? Who is bringing her money? Why and when did they stop? All these questions will arise. There is no evidence to show such a thing happened. She said that is there, we have to eliminate possibilities as you said. I said you are correct. Now we have to think about how she got the money, in this line we have to work to find her killer.

She kissed Reena first then Atul and took them into their room. I could not come to a conclusion about what happened to Sneha. Now after going through everything, it is coming back to her bank account. Where did she get the money, is the question?

Sunitha came out of the room, I asked did the kids sleep? She said yes and came and sat on the Sofa. I switched on tv and we started watching a program.

Sahithi announced dinner and started placing the dishes on the table. Sunitha got up and went to help her. After placing the plates Sunitha said come for the dinner. I looked up and said coming. I washed my hands went and sat on the chair. Sahithi placed two Rotis and aloo curry. The curry looked like the curry Sneha used to make. I asked Sahithi did Chitti made the curry? She said yes. I remembered Sneha never went to the market or grocery shopping after coming here. When in Vakola she used to bring vegetables and groceries while coming back from the clinic. After coming here, she could not go out due to children. That means until she went to the hotel she never stepped out of the house. Except to take the kids to the park. So, whatever she was doing from home only. Now only two possibilities are coming in front. She is doing some kind of business from the house or she was getting the money from her parents or

grandparents. On these points, we should go forward for now. After finishing my dinner, I got up washed my hands came back and sat down on the sofa.

Sunitha came and sat beside me and asked can you drop me at my house at 5 am. I said sure, you are going for duty tomorrow? She said yes, my leave is finished, I had to go. Looking at the children's room she said sadly I miss the kids. I said you can come any time and spend time with them. There is no objection from any of us. She said thanks, I will do that.

I got up at 4 am and made two cups of coffee and woke up Sunitha. I said get up I will drop you at your house. She said sleepily good morning give me five minutes, took the cup and set it on the bedside table. I said I will be ready and went to my room and dressed up. She came out with the bag. I picked up the bag and took the keys and we proceeded to the parking. I put the bag in the front and started driving towards her house. I was there by 4:55. I said I am on time I hope. She said thanks. I said shall I bring the bag to your door. She said it's ok I can manage. I turned back to our house.

For the next few days, I was busy with work. We got a big order from the paint company in Vakola. We were trying to complete the order and deliver the tins to them. Then there are other client's orders we have to finish. It was a very tough week. We were working for 18 hours per day. I asked Sahithi to go home on her own. I used to drop her off in the morning, I was coming back home after midnight. Sahithi had three days' holiday and she decided to spend them with her parents and her sister and her kids. She said she would take the kids to her parent's house, I said take Chitti with you she would be helpful to you. She said she thought of that. She did not want to leave her alone in the house.

It is Sunday evening, I was home early as I just delivered to the paint company and back. I thought I will take some rest after working full time for the last week. Kirit said he will finish the work and go home. I parked the scooter and went up to our flat, I was about to open the door, I heard a voice call my name from behind. It's Sunitha, I asked what are you doing here? She replied I came to see the kids, I rang the bell and no one opened the door. I thought Chitti must have taken the kids to the park or something. I was just out to the park not finding her there I came back. I saw you entering the building on your scooter came running. I asked what is the need for running? She said it's literally running, just a figure of speech. I asked now you are also using the figure of speeches? She laughed and said oh, don't talk rubbish. I let that one ride.

I opened the door and said come in, would you like a cup of tea? She asked did I ever refuse a cup of tea? I said question with a question. I put the bag down and

went and washed my face and changed went into the kitchen made two cups and brought them and put them on the table.

I asked so, what is the news? She said news, there is no news. I said no news is good news. She asked what do you mean. I said that is a figure of speech, no news is good news. It has to do with the warfront. If there is no news from the warfront means, everyone is safe there.

She said you are on a roll today with the figure of speeches. I said who started?

She asked where are the kids? I switched on the tv and said they are at Sahithi's parent's place. There are three days' holidays and she is spending there with her sister and her kids. She said I missed them, that's why I came to look at them. I asked shall I take you to them? She replied no, it would not look good. What would they think? I said ok, no problem. You can look at them when they return.

I got up and asked her shall I bring something to eat? She said I will prepare something. I said I will bring chicken from the shop. I went and brought chicken and asked her will you make it or shall I make it? If you are a good cook you better make it. I said then cut some onions and I will prepare this chicken. With her help, I made chicken fry and made rasam. Put rice in the cooker and came out and sat on the sofa. I switched on the tv. There was a scene of the characters drinking. I remembered I had half a bottle somewhere. I got up and searched in the kitchen cupboard and found the bottle. I brought the bottle put it on the table. I asked her would you like a peg. She said I don't drink. I said ok and brought myself a glass and some chicken pieces. I poured a drink and said to Sunitha to have some chicken. She picked a piece and started chewing it. I sipped and took a piece in my mouth. After a few minutes, she asked can I taste a little. I offered her my glass, she took the glass drank it with a gulp and took a chicken piece and started chewing it. I looked at her poured a little into the glass, gave her the glass. She sipped the drink and picked a piece of chicken. I got up brought myself a glass and sat down. I poured myself a drink and sipped a little and put it down. I got up replenished the chicken on the plate. We both sat and completed the bottle and chicken on the plate. I said I will serve the dinner went into the kitchen brought the dishes, put them on the table. I put two plates and called her to the table. We finished dinner in silence, washed my hands and came and sat on the sofa. She sat on the side sofa watching the tv. I looked at her, I thought she was so pretty. If she had married my brother she would be my bhabhi. Now she is nothing to us. Why did she come to my house today? She said she had come for the kids. Even after knowing they are not here, she stayed back. When I said I will bring something to eat, she offered to

cook. Then she sat with me had drinks. What to make of it. I got up to go to the toilet. As I was entering she said I will go and sleep. I said ok and closed the toilet door. I came back sat on the sofa as no one is in the house, lit a fag sat watching tv. When the program finished I switched off the tv, lights and went to the bedroom. There is a bed light on and I went and sat on the bed. I turned to lay on the bed, I found a silhouette on the bed. I looked closely it is Sunitha. What she is doing here? I thought I should go and sleep in the children's room. As I was getting up to go she caught my hand asked where are you going? I am waiting for you. She pulled me, as I was not expecting her to pull me, I fell on her.

Sunitha

I had finished my shift early and the next day is a weekly off for me. I thought I should go and look at the kids. I might find Kumar also. Why my heart is pulling me towards him? Why do I feel like I should meet him? what is my relation to him? why am I feeling empty in my heart for not meeting him for the last ten days? What is happening to me? I have not felt like this about anyone. Even with my last boyfriend, I have not felt like this. Ram, I have spent a week and he did not have this kind of pull on me. What is that between us?

I went to Kumar's house, it's locked. Where does Chitti go? Must have gone to a park or something. I went and looked around the park, she was not found. I came out of the park, walking towards the building, I saw Kumar entering the building on his scooter. I went to the house. By the time I reached his flat, he was about to open the door. We went in and he said he will bring chicken. When he brought the chicken, I helped him prepare it and then he removed a bottle of whisky from somewhere. When he asked me I said no, what would he think if I had said yes. Then when he asked me to help myself to some chicken, when I put the chicken in my mouth, I remembered the party I had with my girlfriends in college. I asked him to let me taste it. He gave me his glass, I took a gulp of it. Then he put another peg in the glass and gave it to me. It means he did not mind my drinking. So, we together finished the drink in the bottle. I felt the drink going into my head. When he called to have dinner, I silently had dinner and after some time, I said I will go and sleep. I thought he will come behind me when I entered their bedroom. Instead, he went and watched tv. I waited for him and drifted off to sleep. When he sat on the bed I woke up with the movement of the bed. He saw me instead of sleeping he was about to go away, I pulled him and he fell on me. I did not feel any pain, instead, something moved in my heart. I pulled him close and kissed him on the mouth.

Chapter 4

Kumar

It is one month after that night at our house. We did not feel any guilt after that night. We felt like our souls have matched and become one. We felt like we have been together for infinity. It's something that can't be described in words.

Sunitha was coming to our house every week on her weekly off. She was sleeping in the children's room. We have been acting as if nothing happened between us. Sahithi did not suspect Sunitha was at our house on that Sunday night. Even though we were not physically close during this month, we felt like our souls have become one. We could feel each other's feelings and thoughts like a telephone connection between our minds. Without touching each other we could feel the closeness. We don't need to sleep with each other to feel the closeness. The thought of that night would bring us close.

Sunitha decided to rent a flat for herself. She told her parents that she would live with her colleagues as it would be easier for them to attend to her duties. We went and looked at some flats. One flat we found suitable as the owners were away in Nagpur and they asked the watchman to rent it out. We said to him that she works as an air hostess and I am travelling regularly. We would not be at home every day. We paid the advance and took the keys from him. It was a furnished apartment and we did not need anything else. We replenished groceries and vegetables and I left her at her house to collect her things. I put some nightdresses and a dress in the bag and went to the flat and left them there.

Now instead of Sunitha coming to see the children, I would go to the flat on her weekly off day. I started managing my hours around her timings. As we explained to the watchman, we could come and go as we please. As it was on the ground floor, normally no one would disturb us. But our neighbours were so nosy people. We used to come separately and go separately. One of the neighbours caught me as I was going, started making small conversation. I looked at my watch and said I will miss my train, talk to you later and went away.

Sunitha

After spending the night with Kumar at his house, I felt I was on cloud nine. I was going on every week off to Kumar's house on the pretext of seeing the kids.

After a month of seeing him and being able not to touch him, I felt like something is missing in my life. I told my parents I would like to stay with our other air hostesses and told Kumar I would like to rent a flat, somewhere easy for both of us. He found a good flat for us and he paid the advance and rented the flat. Now we can meet regularly and spend time. I could not keep away from him. I want to meet him daily, but my timings would not allow it. We try to meet on my weekly off days. He could always say he had some work and getaway. This way we started spending our time with each other.

Chapter 5

The year 1991

Kumar

Sunitha and I were spending whatever time was available with us. She has a vice-like grip on me. Looking at the children I wanted to get away from her, I could not stop going to the flat whenever she calls me. During the last month, she used to take extra leave and asked me to meet her at the flat. She was becoming wild day by day. Her demands were increasing and she was pressing me like the machine removes sugar cane juice running me dry. Kirit suspected something is happening in my life, still, he kept his mouth shut. If I had spent the night with her I had to go home and sleep it off. Sahithi did not suspect anything as I was always working late and would come home tired. Now the children's birthday is coming up and we have to prepare for it.

Sahithi

Kumar is working too much for the last few months. I don't know what Kirit pays him but he works him to his full capacity. I thought to ask Kirit about this, but thinking they acted like friends could not ask him. As per Kumar, Kirit spends more time with Mahira than at the office, Kumar had to take extra work. What is with these two, I could not understand. I find Sunitha was also not coming to see children as before. She must be busy with her work. Whenever she comes, Chitti gets some free time she would do some cleanup work, go shopping. Nowadays I had to do grocery and vegetable shopping. Or else I keep looking after the kids and let Chitti go shopping. She also should get some time to go out. How can she be cooped up in this house forever? She has to learn to live in this world. Sometimes I think I should resign and look for something else less tiring. Even if I get half of what I am getting that would be okay. I have to speak to Kumar about this.

Kirit

There was something of a change in Kumar. He was not concentrating like before. At odd hours he would go away and come back. Sometimes he would come late to the factory. I have to speak to him about this. At least both of us could maintain the work at the factory. Dad is also not spending much at the factory. He seems to be looking at ways to start new businesses. He would sit with the uncle and plan businesses. He has left the factory for both of us to run.

We have a good shop floor supervisor, who can look after the factory. At least the factory is not suffering due to this. Sometimes I also go out with Mahira, she would ask me to take to her clients. Kumar covers me during those times, I have to cover for him. After we discussed Sneha's death, not an accident, he was a changed man. He would look at ways to find what happened to her. Then after finding her passbook he would look at ways she would earn that money. Maybe thinking about her death, he is not sleeping well. Probably getting some clue he would rush to clear his doubts. We have supported him all this time, we will cover for him for some more time.

I got a bottle of foreign whiskey from a friend. We did not have a place to have a party. I asked Kumar, can we have a party at your house? Showed him the bottle. He said he had a better place, one of his friends had a flat nearby, he goes on trips, we can have parties there whenever we like. I called Mahira there and we went to the place indicated by Kumar. We three of us entered the gate, he nodded to the watchman and we went to the flat by opening the door with his key. We sat down set down the bottle. Kumar brought glasses from inside and put a plate of snacks. We started sipping our drinks. I heard the sound of the door opening. I said did your friend come shall I pour another glass. He said to wait and went out. We heard whispers and Sunitha came in. I was surprised, is it Sunitha's flat? She said hi, are you having a party, carry on and went to the other room, changed and came in. She asked what is the occasion? I said a friend gave us this bottle, we just want to enjoy it. She said pour me a drink. I was surprised that she drank. Kumar brought a glass from inside and I poured her a peg. She gulped the drink and sat down. She took the snacks from the plate munched on them. If it is Sunitha's room how did he get a key to the house? He did not pick it from the watchman. Did he come here regularly? Is he having an affair with her? She seemed to be at home with her drink. Did she drink regularly? Or are they drink buddies? Is this the reason for his lethargy?

I asked Sunitha is this your flat? She replied no, it is one of our colleagues. We all use it for parties or for spending some time like that. Today I have a lay off for two hours, I have to get back. Instead of going home, I came here to change. Her explanation seemed plausible. If you have to go back, can you drink? She replied I just received a message that our trip got cancelled due to some technical snag. I don't have to go back. So, I sat down to drink with you. So, what is happening? How is the work at the factory? I heard you are overworking yourselves. Kumar is not getting time to meet me. I have not seen him possibly for a month. Four of us chatting completed the bottle. Kumar made some

omelettes with bread. We finished eating and laid down on the bedsheet laid on the floor.

I got up looked at the time it is 8 pm. For how long we have been sleeping? I looked around. Mahira sleeping a little distance, she is covered in a bedsheet. It seems Kumar and Sunitha must have gone out. I got up finding myself in undies. Where are my clothes? I found them at a little distance. I went picked them up and wore them. Went to Mahira lifted the bedsheet a little, she was without any clothes on her, I dropped the bedsheet. What happened here? The last thing I remember is having an omelette with bread and laying on the floor and going to sleep. Whatever happened I should not be here when she wakes up. Went and looked at the other room. Kumar and Sunitha were sleeping on the bed they are covered in a single bedsheet. What is happening around here? What were they doing? What was I doing here? Let me get out of here. Kumar can look after Mahira if she wakes up. I took my bike keys and went out of the door, the watchman was not there at the gate. I took my bike and drove to my house.

Kumar

After serving them omelettes, I took Sunitha to the bedroom and left her there and came back. Removed the bottle and glasses and put them in the kitchen. When I came back Mahira was awake and trying to wake up Kirit. He must have too much to drink. She was kissing him and trying to arouse him. Seeing them like that my inner self woke up and I went to the bedroom and started kissing Sunitha. We are spent and went to sleep. I woke up at around 9 pm. I came into the other room, Kirit must have gone away, Mahira still sleeping on the bedsheet. I woke her up. She got up and found herself without any clothes she pulled the bedsheet up and said hand me my clothes. I gave her clothes came out of the room and closed the door.

Mahira

What happened to me I don't know. After consuming alcohol, I became a different person. I literally did everything possible with Kirit. He cooperated with me and after we spent went to sleep. I woke up when Kumar awoke me. Finding no clothes on me I pulled up the bedsheet and asked him to give me my clothes. he gave me clothes and left the room closing the door behind me.

I dressed up and came out of the room, Kumar is sitting there smoking. I asked him to give me a fag. He handed me one and lit it. I inhaled the smoke and looked at him. He was not minding me. I thought he did not think of anything of

what we did. Is he aware of Kirit's indiscretions? What he must be thinking? I did not get the courage to ask him that. Instead, asked him where is Kirit. He said he must have gone home, his bike is not there. I asked him how will I go home. He said I will drop you home or you can stay the night. I said I am well-rested, I want to go home. He took the scooter keys said I will drop you, first let me tell Sunitha. He went to the bedroom whispered something and came out. He said let us go. We came out of the house, the watchman is sitting at the gate. He told him I will drop her off and come. He dropped me at my house and went away.

Chapter 6

Kumar

I have arranged the party for the children's birthday. This time the party is low-key. My expenses have increased and my income was static. We only called family members, Kirit, Mahira, and Sunitha. This time Sunitha kept her distance from Ram. He brought his friends to the party.

Party was a little dull, which was spruced by Ram's friend's singing. We sat around and he was singing. The party finished and they had dinner and left.

After the party, Kirit caught me and took me aside. He asked me what happened after the party? I asked don't you remember anything. After sleeping off I don't remember anything until 8 pm when I got up from sleep he replied. I said after the party Mahira almost raped you. She was kissing you, arousing you and I left the room then. I don't know really what happened after that. He said when I woke up we both were on the floor. She was under a bedsheet and I was on the floor. I asked was it your first night? He replied we have not been like that before. I don't know what came of her? One thing I am regretting is that I can't remember anything. I said if you want I will arrange another sitting for you, this time don't drink too much. He said please arrange that for me.

Sahithi

This year's birthday was a little offkey. Kumar only invited our families and his friends. The men had their party and had dinner and left. I asked Kumar what happened this year? He said tensions at work prevented me from going for a big party. So, this low-key affair. Over these children are still little, they won't remember anything. When they grow up they will demand a bigger party. Then we can't have these drink parties. At least your family and my family had attended. I asked who came with your brother. He said he is a great singer. He is my brother's friend. Did you hear him sing? Marvellous singing talent. I brought a peg and gave and said you did not have a drink today, have this and come for dinner. I asked where is Sunitha, she did not come for the children's birthday? He said she might be flying tonight, I don't know. I looked at him suspiciously, I thought you knew her every schedule, did you not invite her? he said I might have forgotten to inform her, I don't remember. I said you are becoming very tense these days, don't work so much. You don't remember what you are doing. Concentrate on the house also. What time you are coming home, I don't know. He looked at me wearily and said ok, I will do that. What is becoming of him? he

is not even taking care of children. I doubt he even hugs them nowadays. He is their father, if he did not take care of them, who will take care?

Kumar

Sunitha said she will be back by 11 pm and called me to come to the flat. I said give me a ring when you come back. I can make an excuse and go there. I don't know what I am seeing in Sunitha over Sahithi. Why am I running after her? Sunitha is more beautiful and Sahithi is more caring. Then Why am I choosing Sunitha? What name can we give to our relationship? The phone rang and I went and lifted the receiver and said hello, then on the other side the phone cut. I said I will come right away and cradled the receiver. Seeing Sahithi looking at me I said there is an emergency at the factory, they called Kirit and he has not reached home. So, they are calling me to come immediately. I dressed and took the scooter keys and left the home to go to Sunitha's flat.

Sunitha

I could not live without Kumar's presence in my life. Even though it was not my weekly off, I had to meet him. So, I called to come when I reach the flat. I was becoming more desperate for his bodily companionship. Even on the flight, I was thinking about him only. It was interfering with my work. I want him to myself. How can I achieve that? At least he agreed to come at this hour. Today is his children's birthday and he must be busy with the celebrations. I could not attend, because I could not get the day off and our flight was delayed. I thought his children were my priority, but now Kumar was becoming my number one priority. Shall I leave this job and get one where I need to work 9 to 5. Or where I can work in shifts and he could make time to meet. Something on those lines. What should I do? I couldn't make up my mind. If my parents know this, what they would think? They would say don't enter our house again. Go and live with him only? That would be ok. I was sitting in the hall with my thoughts. I heard the door opening, rushed to the door, I did not let him close it, I flung myself at him and started kissing him. he seems surprised with my attitude. I took him to the bedroom. Threw him on the bed almost raped him with my urgency.

Satiated I slept beside him, put my hand on his chest, said I could not live without you. This thing of meeting on weekly off days is not working. We need to meet more often. What can I do to make that happen?

Kumar

Her question threw me off guard. After a full day of work and arrangements of the party and this thing with Sunitha made me fully tired.

I said give me some time to think. She said ok, let me know your opinion. I drifted off to sleep. I got up in the morning, saw Sunitha still sleeping took out my keys, and went home.

Sahithi asked what took so long? I said I was tired, I slept in the office. She seemed to believe me. What if she asks Kirit? I have to keep informing him of the details to keep him covering for me. Otherwise, he may get confused and tell the truth. I can always say he did not know the details that is why he is getting confused.

What is happening to me, I thought of myself as the most truthful and honest person. For Sunitha's sake, I am lying through my teeth. How long can this continue, what will happen if Sahithi came to know of my relationship with Sunitha? She will certainly will threw me out of the house. I don't have to worry because now I can go to Sunitha's flat. What if that's what Sunitha wants and tells Sahithi about our affair? Sunitha would make Sahithi throw me out of the house? But what would happen after that? Would she file a complaint, would she ask for a divorce? I can cover both of them with the help of a clever lawyer. My marriage with Sahithi consummated at the time I was married to Sneha. Can she ask for a divorce based on that? I don't have the legal knowledge, but that point could come up in our case. I don't have any assets or big bank balances in my name, by giving me a divorce she could gain nothing from it. Over that she had the flat on her name. I could contest for a share of that. She may not go to court for a divorce. Any lawyer would discourage her.

I completed my bath and went to the bedroom to wear fresh clothes. Dressed up I came out and sat at the dining table. Chitti brought the breakfast and placed it on the table. It is Pongal, not the sweet variety but laced with black pepper and fried Kaju. It is one of my favourites. She made tomato chutney to go with it. I had two servings and got up and washed my hands and sat on the sofa. Chitti brought a cup of tea and handed it to me. I asked her where is Sahithi. She said she must be bathing. I asked so long? She replied I don't know.

Sahithi went to the bedroom to dress. She came back and sat down for breakfast. She silently ate breakfast and got up and washed her hands came and sat on the sofa. Chitti brought her cup of tea. She silently took it and started sipping it. I thought why the silent treatment?

I took the scooter keys and asked her are you coming? She just nodded. I went down took the scooter out started and waited for her. She came after two minutes sat behind me silently. I looked back seeing her seating properly started to drive. I dropped her off and reached the factory. Kirit was waiting eagerly, I got a bottle of whiskey, when shall we have our party? I said let me check Sunitha's schedule, I will plan it accordingly. He must have thought I want to include Sunitha in the party, I had other ideas I want to exclude her from the party. I said give me two days I will plan something for Sunday. He said ok.

On Saturday night I went to Sunitha's flat. After our sex I asked are you available tomorrow Kirit is planning a party? She asked at what time? I said around 2 pm. She said no, I can't make it, I have a flight. I said ok, thinking that's what I wanted. I showed my disappointed face and said oh, I will miss you.

I rang up Kirit and said the party is on for Sunday at 2 pm, inform Mahira also. I already informed her, I will confirm with her tomorrow morning.

I got up dressed and said will see you tomorrow evening and went to my house.

The next day After breakfast I said to Sahithi, we have some work at the factory, Kirit told me to come. I will come back in the evening. I went to Sunitha's flat with some snacks and called Kirit everything ready. He said he will come there.

Around 1:30 pm Kirit came with Mahira. I have already arranged for the party. He took out the bottle and put it in the middle. I warned him don't drink too much. We had two pegs each and I put the bottle aside. I said we will have it later. Taking that as a signal Kirit went and sat beside Mahira. Mahira's back is to the door. I got up took the glasses and plates and went to the kitchen. I came back and looked into the room. Kirit put his hand on her shoulder whispering something in her ears. I went and sat on the other side of Mahira. She seemed surprised to find me there. She looked at me and saw the lust in my eyes. She asked how long you were holding this. I said from the time of our last party. When I saw your chest that day I have fallen for you. I reached and kissed her on the mouth. Kirit must have thought I was taking the lead, turned her head to his side kissed her. I pressed her boob on my side. A little sound left her mouth. I reached behind her and pulled the zip of her dress. I pulled the dress up and threw it aside. She did not mind my actions. I pressed her on her bra. She turned to me and kissed me on the mouth. I and Kirit took turns kissing her. She said to Kirit please ride me. He got on top of her and started having sex. I put my dick in her mouth taking a blow job. We did not hear the door nor see Sunitha standing at the door. When I heard the door bang shut, I realized that someone came and looked at us and went away. My whole body froze. I got up dressed up and

looked out, no one was there. I went and asked the watchman has Sunitha come now. He said she came and went away. Now I understood what a blunder I made. Because I invited her, she came and saw us and went away. I went in and said to Kirit, I am going home lock the door while going away and went home. I reached home and opened the door stepped into the hall. I find Sunitha sitting there glaring at me. I don't want to take any risk and said hi Sunitha, when did you come. As I don't know what she told Sahithi, I kept my mouth shut. Sahithi came out and said sarcastically did you finish your work? Now I understood Sunitha must have told her. Still keeping my senses, I did not say anything. Sunitha said ask him what is he doing. I looked at Sahithi. She did not say anything. I looked at Sunitha. Sunitha said angrily he is having an affair with Mahira. He Kirit and Mahira were having a threesome. Still, Sahithi did not say anything. Sunitha shouted am I not sufficient for you, now you are fucking Mahira? What is with you men, you go and fuck anyone who comes in front of you?

Sahithi asked Sunitha how did you know he was having a relationship with her. She said I saw with my own eyes. Sahithi asked where? Sunitha replied at my flat. Sahithi asked what were they doing at your flat? Sunitha replied they were having a party. Sahithi asked what kind of party? Sunitha replied drinks party. Sahithi asked did you give them keys? Sunitha replied Kumar had a set of keys to the flat. Sahithi asked so you gave him a set of keys to him. Sunitha replied it is Kumar who rented the flat for me and he kept a set. What was he doing with the keys asked Sahithi? Sunitha replied he was meeting me there weekly. Sahithi asked so, it was you he was having an affair? Sunitha's face pulled down and replied yes. So, it was you after rejecting his brother who had a relationship with him. You were staying with your parents, now you rented a flat and had affair with my husband. Now you are saying that he is having an affair with someone else. I don't understand who is at fault here, you are him? Sahithi gave a tongue lashing to Sunitha. Unable to bear the constant questioning she got up and stormed out of the house. Sahithi looked at me and asked what is going on? It is true that I had looked and found a flat for her. I had an extra key with me to the flat. I used to go and replenish groceries and vegetables. It is close to the factory, sometimes we go and prepare lunch or dinner there. One night we had our lunch and I felt a little drowsy and fell asleep there. Kirit had gone back to the factory. During sleep, I felt someone sleep beside me and I thought it was you and let her have sex with me. When I woke up it was her sleeping beside me. I got up and ran away to the factory. That was the only time I had sex with her. Today Kirit brought a bottle of foreign liquor and we decided to have the party there. I did not know she would come unexpectedly. She saw Kirit and

Mahira and thought it was me and rushed to you with accusations. She looked at me angrily. I said I just had sex with her only once that too thinking it was you. I did not have any intention of having an affair with her. It was all in her head. She was a maniac, she was always calling me to come to her flat. I always went with Kirit. So, she did not have a chance to put her hooks into me. That's why she is trying to separate us, so I will go to her running. I looked at Sahithi, it seems her brain is working overtime to understand the situation. I know women take their husband's words over any others. I had given a plausible explanation and waited for her reaction. She sat there sitting for maybe five minutes. She looked at me and asked you did not have an affair with her? I said no. I said I promise on Sneha, thinking she is already dead. I don't do promises and she seemed to believe me. She came to me kissed me on the head asked you won't leave me and go away? It seems it's her fear of my going away, she has forgiven me.

The next day I met Kirit and said sorry I got away in between, did you have good time? He said we had a wonderful time, thanks to you. After you went away she became wilder and I had my first experience. I said for the time being we lost access to Sunitha's flat and explained to him what happened at my house. He asked how did Sahithi had forgiven you for sleeping with Sunitha. I said it is a woman's weakness I hit upon, she thinks I slept with her thinking it was Sahithi. It was natural for her to forgive me else she would lose a loving husband. She had no intention of losing me. If she tells me to go away she would lose the children also. That's where I hit her. She knew she could not have children of her own, she was scared to death of childbearing. She treats them as her own and she could not live without them. Kirit said what will we do for our next party? He seems eager to meet Mahira again. I said I will try to make up with Sunitha. She is also dependent on me for emotional support. This will be a temporary situation.

Sahithi

I was so angry with Kumar. But I know my Kumar would not do such a thing with any other woman. Even when Sneha was alive, he would come and be with me only. How can I believe Sunitha? She seemed to be lying. She had her eyes on Kumar from the last year when she came to our home on the kid's birthday. Even she rejected Kumar's brother after spending a week with him. What kind of girl would do that? At first, I thought she was coming to our house for the kids. Now I understand that she was coming for Kumar. She must be trying to get close to him since that time. As she could not lay her hands on him she

made him look for a flat. She would know one day or other she could corner him to have sex with him. When she found him sleeping tiredly she had sex with him. It is all her fault. What I could not understand is what she is talking about Mahira. I know Mahira and Kirit were close, but they always behaved like best friends. Kumar did not intrude into their relationship at all. I saw him keeping Mahira at arm's length. Whatever she was talking about Mahira should be jealous. She was jealous that they have not included her in the party or not informed her or not taken her permission. Otherwise, why would she come and talk of Mahira like that? The only thing, as she could not corner Kumar, she wants to separate us and she would take him to her house. That only seems a plausible reason for her reaction. Yes, she wanted to separate us. I should not let that happen to our relationship. What she thinks about married couples relation, she could break us up like that. I would never let that happen. Kumar is only my true love. I have not loved anyone else in my life. When I saw him after Sneha went away, I could not let him get away from me. From the time I laid my eyes on him, I have a soft corner for him. I was disappointed when I found out he was already married. I went and looked at his wife, she was not as beautiful as me but she was reasonably pretty maybe a little dark. When she came back I thought he would leave me and go and live with her, that is the reason I let her stay with us. If I had asked him to keep her somewhere else he would have gone with her. I kept him close and her and her children closer. It was just a misunderstanding that day when we quarrelled. He took her away and kept her at the hotel, but he stayed with me only. That day he proved he was mine only. When Sneha died he was not that much heartbroken as I had anticipated. That proved another point, he would prioritize me over her. When Sunitha came and accused him, how calmly he spoke and defended himself. That proves his innocence. Now I am sure he is mine only, I don't have any fear of losing him.

Sunitha

When I saw Kumar with them my blood boiled with rage. I came out of the house. For this, he called me today? What is he doing with them? Getting a blow job from Mahira, when Kirit fucking her? How long this was going on? I have to do something. I went to his house to complain about him to Sahithi. Instead of throwing him out of the house, she defended him. what does she think about herself? She called me names instead of Kumar. Forget her and forget him. I can live my life without him. What is he to me, not my husband, just a fucking buddy? He never told me I love you until now. I also did not tell him. It is not love between us, it is only lust. I want him to fuck me, that's all I want from him. He is a marvellous lover in bed. I would miss that, forget him.

Maybe when the advance runs out I will go back to my parent's place. I don't have weekly off until Wednesday. I will decide what to do then.

Kumar

I checked with the airlines and found her next weekly off is next Wednesday. So, this Sunday she would not be at the flat. I gave the keys to Kirit and said you can have your party on Sunday at the flat. I could not make it as I have to make it up to Sahithi. If Sunitha comes home you can always invite her to the party.

On Wednesday, I dropped Sahithi at her office and went straight to Sunitha's flat. I know she would be asleep at this time. I took the keys from Kirit on Monday itself. I opened the door silently went into the bedroom. She is fast asleep. I removed my clothes and went inside the bedsheet. I pulled her close and started to kiss her. She woke up with a jerk and shrieked. I said in a whisper it is me. Seeing me on the bed she started kissing me. Having spent I turned and picked a fag from the nightstand and lit it. She put her hand on my chest and said where did you go? I thought I would never see you again. I asked her angrily are you mad to over to Sahithi? She said angrily what are doing with Mahira? I said she invited me for a blow job. It is just a blow job, I did not have sex with her. She said promise, you did not have sex with her. I said I promise I did not. She kissed me on the cheek and said promise me you will not abandon me anytime. I said why would I abandon you, you are my love, you are my everything. I told you I will plan something and you went and told Sahithi everything. Now if try to get away she will suspect me. Let us continue like this for some time. I will plan something for the future. She said why don't you leave her? How can I do that I asked? She would contest for children. Everything will come up in divorce and I don't know what the courts will decide. Better to let sleeping dogs lie. Let us see what the future holds for us.

Sunitha

When Kumar started kissing me while I was sleeping I thought someone had come into the flat. When I found it was Kumar, I could not contain my happiness. I thought I lost him forever, but here he is lying beside me smoking. I asked him why don't you leave Sahithi and come live with me? He gave some mumbo jumbo about courts and children's custody. I am sure he did not want to leave her. It is no problem he never promised me he would leave her to come to stay with me. Before this day I never asked him to leave her. There is still time for that. I have to plan something to separate them. That is the only way I can have him to myself. I have used the excuse, he is with other women with her,

which failed. What else a woman can use against a fellow woman leaving her husband, I have to think hard and fast, I might come up with a good idea.

Kumar

Now Sunitha is back in my fold. She is making me so tired but the sex is worth it. Now I have convinced her to give me some time to plan, she would back off doing something stupid as she did going to Sahithi. I have put these two in their places. I have missed that day with Mahira, I think it would be stupid of me to try something again so soon. It would be impossible to try it at Sunitha's place. We have to find another place. Going to a hotel is not safe.

Kirit sent me to collect payment from Thane. I went by a scooter while coming back little drizzle started. As I was not inconvenienced by the drizzle I did not stop. While I am nearing Bhandup a car from behind came and must have slipped on some stones or something, it veered a little and scratched me on the side. I was going slowly and I fell down from the scooter. I had scratches on my hands. I got up straightened the scooter and put it on the stand. I looked at the car which stopped a little ahead. A lady got out of the car and came over. Seeing I am not injured seriously, she said I am sorry, the car lost control. Take my card, when you get treated come and collect the medical bill from me. I have been delayed otherwise I would have taken you to the hospital myself. I said I am ok, I don't think I will need any medical attention. She said no problem come and meet me.

I looked at the card her name mentioned on the card was Loveleen Khanna. I thought she is Punjabi. The company name is Loveleen's Interior Decorating Services and its address is in Andheri West. I put the card in my pocket and started the scooter went to the factory. I went to the toilet cleaned myself and came into the cabin. Kirit looking at me asked what happened? A car just scratched and I fell down and some scratches on my hands. He said let me look. I said no problem. He asked who is that did you take down the car no? I said it was a lady she did give me a card and told me to come and meet her. I handed him the card. He studied the card and said she is a Punjabi and she has an interior decoration business. We can have our house decorated freely. I said don't be a fool. We should not extort people like that. Kirit asked is she pretty? I said I don't know It was a little dark. He said she gave you a card then go and see her and tell me. I said you have a dirty mind.

The next day I went to Jogeshwari west on work while returning I remembered the card given by Loveleen. I wanted to see how she looked and she would be

wondering she left me on the side of the road and how I might be. I went to the address mentioned parked in the parking area went to her office. It was tastefully decorated and it looked every inch an interior decorating office. There was a receptionist sitting at a counter and I went to her showed the card she gave me and said I want to meet her. She asked what work you have with her? I said she called me. She said go inside the last cabin is hers. I went inside went to the last cabin. Knocked on the door and went inside. She must have thought I was some worker of hers and asked did you finish the work? I said what work. She said sorry, who are you. I said yesterday you gave me this card. She must have remembered the accident yesterday, sorry I did not recognize you, it was dark yesterday. I said no problem. She said sit down. Do you drink something, coffee or tea or perhaps a cool drink? I said no thanks. I just came over to inform you that I am ok. Just a little scratch on my hand showed her the small band-aid I put on the scratch. She heaved a sigh and said thank god you were not hurt, I was scared you might have been hurt, I was late and I could not attend to you. I said no problem, I am ok. She asked what do you do? I am a manager with the Tin Packing Manufacturing unit. What do you do there? I said I look after the whole factory. she said So young and a manager who looks after the factory. She sat back leisurely and asked where do you stay. I said Vikhroli. She asked own or rented. I said the house is owned by my wife. She asked so you are already married? I said I have two children, twins. She asked what is their names? I said Atul and Reena. She asked what are their age? I said they just had their third birthday. She said give me your house address, I want to see your kids. I was surprised by her asking to see my kids. I thought she might be interested in children and I have written the address back of my card with the telephone number. She looked at the card and said you have a phone at home too. I said my father got me that phone, he is in the department. She said if I could not find the address, I can always call you.

On Sunday I bathed the kids and was dressing them in the hall. The doorbell rang and Chitti went and opened the door. I heard a voice asking is this Kumar's residence? I got up and went to the door, it is Loveleen, I had not expected to see her at my door. I thought she was just asking for my address. I went and invited her inside. She came with some presents for the children. I said what is the need for the presents? She said how can I come with empty hands to see the kids. I put aside the presents and said he is Atul and She is Reena. She lifted Atul and said how are doing to him. I don't know what he understood he laughed at her. I never saw him laugh like that. I said he seems to like you, he never laughed like that. She said I like him too. Sat down on the sofa and put him on her lap. Sahithi came out of the bedroom hearing voices. She looked at

Loveleen and looked at me enquiring who is she. I said to her she is Loveleen and to Loveleen she is Sahithi, my wife. Loveleen seeing Sneha's photo on the wall got up and went to look at it. There were two photos of, one Sneha was alone and a garland on her photo and one where she was with the twins. Seeing the garland, she understood she is no more and asked who is she with the kids? I said she is Sneha and she is the mother of these two. Loveleen looked at Sahithi and said is she your second wife. I said yes. She went back and sat on the sofa. She asked how did she die? I said in a fire accident. She said I am so sorry. Did you remarry to look after the kids? I said I married Sahithi before Sneha's death. She was taken aback by my words and said a fascinating story. I will hear your story one of these days. She handed Atul to Chitti and kissed him and said to him see you and started to go. I said will you have something coffee or tea. She said some other time I have to meet someone and went to the door. I opened the door said I will drop you at your car. I lead the way to her car. When we reached the car, she said come to my house next Sunday we have a party. I will give you a call and inform you time and place. I said ok and she drove away.

I came back home, Sahithi asked who is she? I showed my band-aids on my hand and she is responsible for these. Is she the one who hit you with the car? I said she did not hit me, the car just touched me. She said it is one and the same.

She rang me up at the factory and said to come to the party after 7 pm. I asked her can I bring my friends also? She said bring whoever you want to bring. I asked her the address, she gave her address and phone no.

I told Kirit about the party on Sunday evening and she invited them too. You can bring Mahira, Sunitha may not be available. We readied and went to the address given by Loveleen. It is a bungalow on the Koliwada beside the beach. The party is arranged on the beachside. It was my first time to enter such a bungalow. We went inside and I introduced Kirit and Mahira. She asked what they do? I said Kirit is the owner of the factory and Mahira works as a Marketing executive with a courier company. She asked how do you know Mahira? I said we know her for the last six years and did not elaborate. She took us to the bar and told us to get what you want. We took the drinks to our liking and came and sat at a table. Loveleen said I will come back and went to receive the guests. We must be early arrivals, there were not many guests. A server brought some snacks and placed them in front of us. After half an hour Loveleen came to us and asked how are you placed? We said we are good. She said to me don't go away with out informing me. I said I will not go. After another two hours, guests started to disperse, and Loveleen came and sat down at our table. One server brought a drink and placed it in front of her. She asked us do you need anything.

We said nothing we are good. She addressed me and said tell me your story, I was dying to hear it. I said what story? She said your life story yaar, you said you had two wives and one died in an accident. I want to know your story, don't hold back anything. So, I started my story from the time I saw Sneha, how we spend two years studying and then how her parents sent her away. How I eloped with her and married. How after studies we shifted to Bombay. How I got a job with Kirit and how we met Mahira at the factory. How Sneha was literally kidnapped by her grandparents. How she gave birth to the twins. How I misunderstood her and I married Sahithi. How Sneha came back and how we started the hotel. How one day Kirit asked for help and how I have to send her to help at the hotel. How she died in the fire accident. How we deduced it was not an accident and a murder and how we are determined to find the culprit.

After completion of the story, Loveleen said what a story it has all the elements. Mahira who for the first time heard the full story said I did not know you have these many emotions in your story. Kirit said you have missed Sunitha's episode. Loveleen asked what is Sunitha's episode. I said it is not much important as everyone is not aware of the story. Kirit said Sunitha is his girlfriend. Loveleen exclaimed you have a girlfriend too. I said It seems they are trying to pull my leg, nothing like that.

Loveleen said have dinner, we went to the counter and brought ourselves some food and sat down at the table. We finished our dinner and we went to a side to have a fag. We went to Loveleen to take leave and said we would like to leave. She said she will send us on her car and called the driver and said to him to drop us at our houses.

I opened the door and went in and changed and went to the bed and laid down. Sahithi said sleepily what is the time? I said 12:30. She said ok come and sleep. What was the party for? I said we had not asked, it must be a general party.

I drifted off to sleep thinking about the party.

Chapter 7

Kumar

It was 3 months after the party at Loveleen's. We have not heard from her again and I have not tried to contact her.

On a Sunday at around 11 am she came to our house with gifts for the kids. When she rang the bell, I opened the door and found her standing at the door. I said what a surprise. She asked can I come inside? I said come in. the kids are playing on the floor. I said kids see who has come? Atul came running saying, Aunty. She picked him up and came and sat on the sofa. I asked do you want coffee or tea. She said coffee. I said I will get you a coffee and went inside prepared two cups and brought it to her. She asked where is your wife. I said Sahithi and Chitti went to market, she will return in a few minutes. Reena came and sat beside her on the sofa. I said so how come you are here. She asked can't I come to see the kids? I said you can certainly come to see them.

She looked at the house and said when did you paint it last. I said when we moved over here, must be 3 years. She said I will send my men to paint the house. I said what is the need, why are you taking so much trouble. She said what is the trouble, I have workers sitting free, let them do some work.

I was thinking about when will Sahithi come, I have to go to the factory. She asked you seem restless, do you have any urgent work. I said nothing urgent, I have to go to the factory. She said the factory won't run away, come sit. She asked why are sitting as if you are sitting on hot coals? Sit freely it is your house. I said I am waiting for Sahithi to come, we have a party with Kirit and Mahira. She said don't you invite me. I said you can also come, we have a special party. What special she asked? I said drinks and other things. She asked what other things? I said other things and winked. I said don't tell Sahithi. She said if you take me to your party I will not tell. I said ok, you can come. I said if you are coming we have to shift it to another place, where can we have it? She said you can come to my house. I asked your husband would not object? She said we are separated. I asked you and your husband are separated? She said yes. Then whose house is it? She said mine only. I thought we have another place for our parties. Ok, we will have it at your place. I will inform Kirit. I rang up Kirit informed him that our location for the party changed to Loveleen's place and said we will not have a problem with Sunitha. Loveleen asked what problem with Sunitha? The last time we had our party at Sunitha's place and she came suddenly and came and told Sahithi lies. That's what we are worried. She said if

you have your party at my place you will not have any problem. I said thanks. She said there is no need to thank me. What are thanks between friends?

I heard the doorbell, got up and opened the door. Seeing Loveleen Sahithi said when did you come? Loveleen said only ten minutes, I came to see the kids. You have lovely kids and kissed both of them.

Sahithi asked do want to have something. Loveleen said I just had coffee showing the cups on the table. Loveleen took her bag and said I will come again. I got up and went inside to change. Sahithi shouted Loveleen is going, I said I am coming. I dressed up and came out of the bedroom. Sahithi asked where are you going? I said I told you yesterday, I had to go to the factory, Kirit is also coming. We have to discuss expansion plans. She asked when are you coming back. I said it might take three-four hours. She said ok. I took my scooter keys and went down. Loveleen was waiting in her car. I asked you have not gone? She said I am waiting for you, come with me. I put the scooter keys in my pocket got in beside her. It was not my first time sitting in a car but this is a luxurious car. She took me to her house and we went inside. I looked around and said you don't have servants? She said I had given them off. They will come back tomorrow. We went inside and I sat down on a sofa looking around. She put brought a peg of whiskey into a glass and placed it in front of me. I said what is the need, Kirit would be bringing a bottle. She said for the time being have it. I sipped a little and put down the glass. I said can I smoke here. She said certainly and placed an ashtray in front of me. I lit a fag and looked at her. She is wearing a saree but it must be very costly and with a sleeveless blouse. It must be the latest fashion. I don't know much about current fashion trends. She is wearing a string of pearls around her neck. Her hair is open and flowing. I have seen her only casually previously. I would say she is pretty and fair. Above five feet three inches in height with her high heels she would look five' five''. She is slim and petite with curves. This is the first time I notice anyone's curves. I have read it in books but the first time I am noticing such things. Until now I have looked at women as just women. I have not met anyone from high-class society until now. I thought this is how they look and act. Seeing me looking at her from top to bottom, she asked what are you looking at. I said I am seeing how pretty and beautiful you are. She asked haven't you looked at women before. I said this is the first time I am looking at a woman like you, you are so beautiful. I thought Sunitha was beautiful, but you beat her in all the departments.

She asked who is Sunitha I am hearing so much? I said I have a cousin in Madras, they have a neighbour Latha, she is her sister but stays in Bombay and she is an air hostess. When Sunitha went to Madras, my cousin gave her our address to

meet our family. My elder brother is still a bachelor and they thought she will be suitable for him. But she rejected him citing mentally not matching. She asked what is that? I said she is saying he was distant with her, he might have failed in love before and he is not ready to start afresh, something like that. She asked so, what is the connection to you. I said she was helping us in our quest to find the reason for my first wife Sneha's murder. She asked are you sure it is murder. I said we can't find a reason for her accident, so we are treating it as murder for our investigation. Loveleen said so you are investigating your wife death? I said certainly we are. She asked What did you find? At this moment we have eliminated all our suspects, and trying to find new suspects. How will you find new suspects? She asked. I said I don't have an idea, we are brainstorming on that. This party is one of our regular brainstorming sessions. I just said that for the sake of answering her question, it's for some other purpose, drink and merrymaking are these parties for, I was waiting for my chance with Mahira again. I know here I won't get a chance with Mahira, but she invited us so I came over, I don't want to say no to her. I know these high society people will come in handy when we want to climb the society steps. I know I am from the middle class with a low-income job. I am just a commerce graduate without any fancy degrees. I am living in my wife's house, don't have any of my own. One time I was craving for my own house. Now I don't feel for own house. I really don't know what I want at this juncture. I feel something happened to me after Sneha went away. When everyone said she might have married someone else and she got kids from him, something has snapped in my head. But it has not fully snapped otherwise I wouldn't have asked Sahithi to marry before having sex. Somewhere down the lane, something has started changing in me, otherwise, why would I have kept an affair with Sunitha and pining for Mahira, ignoring Sahithi? What has happened to me? Seeing the look on my face, Loveleen asked what happened? I came out of my thoughts said nothing. I am thinking where these people have gone? They should have been here by now. They must have felt awkward coming here for the party, they must have cancelled. I am feeling stifling here, I will go out and sit on the beach. I went out to the beach sat on the sand kept looking at the water.

I don't know how long I sat at the beach, I heard Kirit calling me my name, I turned around. The three of them were standing outside the house looking at me. I showed my hand got up and went to them. I asked why so late? Kirit said you know Mahira, she always delays me, this thing or that thing.

Kirit removed the bottle from his bag, Loveleen chided him, don't bring these bottles to my house again, we have everything here. He said ok, we will not

bring it again. Loveleen said put it aside I will bring it from my collection. She brought a bottle and placed it on the table. I don't know much about whisky, but to me, it seemed like a costly whisky. Kirit lifted the bottle and said ow, what is the price of this beauty? She replied there is no cost for these.

He was about to pour for me, I said I don't want, I already had. Loveleen said only one peg you had. I said I am not in a mood to drink. Mahira said do you need the mood to drink? Kirit said he must have remembered Sneha, at these times you need a peg. I said nothing like that I don't feel like having one.

Loveleen said come inside and lead me to a sofa in the hall. She sat beside me and asked did I say something wrong? Your mood has changed dramatically. I said it is not you, I remembered what I made my life of, it is in shambles. My wife died making the kids motherless, I married my second wife thinking my first wife has abandoned me. Then I went and had an affair with Sunitha and I am craving for others. What I was and what I became. I was like Ram and became Ravan. Craving for anything in sight. Sorry I had looked at you with lust. You are so beautiful and I could not resist myself. Loveleen said you had not done anything wrong. You did not even touch me. Why do you think you looked at me with lust? I did not see any such thing in your eyes. I only saw concern, love and admiration in your eyes. You have not looked at me with lust, you were admiring my beauty. It can be seen when you tried to compare me with Sunitha. What you had with Sunitha must be lust, that is the reason for your having an affair with her. I said I lied to Sahithi about her. You lied because you did not want to hurt Sahithi's sentiments. You were thinking about what she will do once she knew about you and Sunitha. You were considerate towards Sahithi it has nothing to do with Sunitha. The guilt you are feeling is proof enough that you have realized the mistakes you have committed. I said I don't know what to do about Sunitha. Loveleen said give her some time, if she really loves you she would beg you to come back, else she will look for someone else. In her line of duty, there would be dime a dozen. I asked are you sure? She replied I am sure. I asked if you are so knowledgeable, why did you get separated from your husband? What did he do to you? She replied He is incapable to give me a child. I asked her is he impotent? She said it is not that alone he is incapable of love. He did not love me, he was something else. Then why did he marry you? I asked.

She said due to his parent's pressure he has married me. His eyes were somewhere else. I thought she could not say what is in her heart. I let it ride and said don't worry, you will find someone who loves you for what you are. Who will understand you and who will satisfy you mentally and physically.

She looked at me as if what I am saying will happen. I said certainly someone will come into your life and give you what you wanted all along.

Kirit came to the door to see what we are doing, seeing us talking he said come and have a drink. After my talk with Loveleen clouds in my brain have lifted and I said just one drink. Loveleen said pour me also one drink.

After the drink, we all came and sat on the beach. The cool breeze from the sea had a calming effect.

I got up and I have to get back home. Loveleen asked Kirit how did you come? He said by auto. We don't want to drive back after the drinks. She said I will drop you all. First, she dropped Mahira then Kirit and she drove to my house. She asked how are you feeling now. I said I am feeling better. It feels like clouds have cleared from my mind. She said you don't seem to have anyone who speaks with you. I said Sahithi and I don't speak much now. Before marriage, we used to talk for hours. Now I don't know what happened we hardly speak to each other. She said you see that is affecting you. You should speak to her regularly. I said I don't know how I can do that, she must be tense from her work at her office. From the time she was put on typing pool, she was not herself. She thought for a minute and said you tell her to meet me, I will see what I can do for her. I said thanks. She said what did I say no thanks between friends. I said ok, I am not telling you sorry also. She said that's good.

She dropped me at my house and went away. I opened the door went inside. Sahithi asked how did you go to the office, your scooter was here. I said it did not start, I didn't want to waste time and went by auto. How did you get back? She asked. I said Loveleen came to our factory to see it, she dropped me. She wants you to come to her office once, she wants you to get something better, how long will you manage with this typing pool. She said ok and went inside.

Kirit

Why did Kumar call us to Loveleen's place? We had a good whiskey, but we could not do what we came for. It is ok. He seems to get connected to her. We should use her connections to increase our business. I should ask Kumar to check this angle with her. Dad is planning for buying a flat at Prabhadevi, we should ask her to decorate it for us at a low price.

Kumar

After dinner and watching some tv I came into the bedroom lay on the bed and thought about what Loveleen told me. It seems I am missing the Sahithi I know from Vakola. She was bubbly full of life and we would talk for hours. Now she hardly talks with me. What happened to her? Is it because of me? Did I make her a lifeless doll? I have to do something. I was pondering what to do Sahithi came in after completing her work in the kitchen. She asked what are you thinking? I said I am thinking about you, you were talking so much before marriage, now you hardly speak two words. What happened to you, have I done something wrong? She said it is not your fault. It is the work at the office, I could not manage so much work. My shoulders paining from typing and they give more work. I tried to get out of the pool, it is not happening. What I want to do and what I am doing? I thought I will study CS but I could not complete it. I said you wanted to do CS? She said yes, I joined the course also. I left it after doing inter. I said you should have told me, I could have helped you. I helped Kirit finish his degree. I could have always helped you. She said I am sorry I did not tell you about CS. It is my fault only. I said Loveleen said to meet her, you take a day off, I will take you to her. She will show you some way to reduce stress, it is stress and that is very dangerous. She said ok, I will take a day off. She laid by my side. I put my hand on her and said keep your calm always. I know you don't shout. But don't bottle up rage in yourself. Kissed her on the cheek and turned and went to sleep.

After two days she took leave from the office. First, I took her to Churchgate from there I took her to CS Institute and got her admission revalidated. She can now write examinations. We came back to Andheri, from there I took her to Loveleen's office. She looked at the office and exclaimed very good-looking office. I said it is an interior designing company, it should set standards. We went to her cabin and she looked at us said come in and sit down. She called reception and told her not to give her any calls until she tells it. She asked Sahithi what is your problem? I sat back and let Sahithi explain her problems. After hearing her out, Loveleen asked me what is my take on this. I said I have already taken a stand for her and got her readmitted to CS and I will help her study and pass the exams. She said good, you are doing what is in your capacity.

Now, what my advice to you is you take three months' leave from the company. You come and help me in the business. If you can pick up the business, I am planning another branch in Delhi, I have some connections there who were asking me to start there. Then I can leave the business here to you and shift there myself. Sahithi asked if you go to Delhi, what would be my position here. Loveleen said you will be the manager here. You will have to make all the

decisions here. I will not interfere with your work. But my final outlook will be profitability. If you can maintain the present profitability it will be good enough for me. You can think about it and let me know. If you can't make it here, you can always go back to your job. Sahithi said let me check if I can get three months leave or not. I said I can get you a medical certificate, which you can use to get the required leave. Sahithi said what the heck let me try this. I am sure I can manage this business. I am so confident that instead of leave, I will resign and try out here. Loveleen said that is the spirit. Let us try it out. We will plan it and discuss it. I got up, Loveleen said I did not ask you will you have something. I said nothing. We got up and came out. I asked what is your impression? She said she might be thinking of going to Delhi, she wants to leave the business in capable hands. She really wanted you to look after the business instead, she offered me thinking you will help me out. I said brilliant deduction but why she would think I would be suitable for this job? Sahithi said she is a shrewd woman, she knows about your dedication and your ingenuity and you would make a better manager than me, but she also knows you won't leave Kirit and come work with her. So, she played this card of me taking over her business and automatically she will have you as a backup to me to help me out. I said I thought you are just a typist, but you have the qualities to become a manager. Sahithi said some people are born leaders and you are one of them. Wherever you go you will reach the top in no time with your dedication.

We took an auto reached our factory. Sahithi came to our factory for the first time. I took her to our cabin. I showed her the sofa where I sleep when I am delayed in the factory. I said if it did not work out with Loveleen you can always come here and work. We always have a place for someone here. Don't worry about work or money. Neither about children's future. Sneha already made arrangements for their future. She asked what did she do. She saved money in their name. She must have received money from her parents. I have transferred her account to the children's name.

Kirit came from the shop floor. He said to Sahithi it is your first time at the factory. would you like to have something? She said nothing. He asked what happened with Loveleen. I explained the proposal by Loveleen. He said seems to be okay. You should consider it. She said I have considered it, only I am thinking is taking a leave or putting up my papers. He said you should put up your papers, even if it does not work out you can come work with us. She said it is exactly what Kumar told me. You both have the same thought process. He said that why we can work better, he reads my mind about how to go about. I don't have to explain everything to him.

I said I will drop her at home and come. He said ok, come after lunch. I am going to meet Mahira for lunch and come. She said what is with you two, you have become inseparable. He said I am learning marketing from her. I will leave the running of the factory to Kumar and will concentrate on marketing.

We came down caught an auto outside the factory and reached home. Chitti came out of the children's room and asked will you have lunch? Sunitha said yes. Chitti said I will put rice on the stove and come.

After lunch, I said I will go to the factory and took the scooter keys came down.

Sunitha would be at her flat today as it is her weekly off, should I go or should I ignore her for some time. If I go there she would make me tired but that experience would be great. If don't go I would miss this opportunity with her and she might look for someone else. I have to weigh pros and cons. I started the scooter and started driving, automatically it went towards Sunitha's flat. I opened the door entered the hall. Hearing the door sound Sunitha came from Kitchen. I asked what are you making lunch? She said I am making breakfast. I said I had lunch and came, don't worry about me. She said who is worrying about you. It seems she is still angry with me for missing last week. I said I thought of coming last week, but Loveleen called us to her home for a party. She asked who is Loveleen. I said she has an interior decorating company. She asked are getting your house decorated. I said only getting painted. She asked for painting you had to go to an interior decoration firm? I said no, no she offered to paint it free. She asked why did she offer to paint it free. I said because she hit me with her car. She exclaimed you had a car accident and you did not tell me. I said it was not that serious just had a small scratch on my hand. Lifted my shirt hand and showed her the marks. She said angrily still accident is an accident, if something happened to you I would not know. If something happened to me someone would inform you, don't worry. She pulled down her face and said who am I to you to know whatever happens in your life? I said don't talk like that it is nothing. Otherwise, I would have let you know. She said I was so scared when you did not turn up last week. If something had happened I would have not known until later. I was getting fed up with her blabbering. I said don't worry, I am here now, forget everything first, have your breakfast.

She went inside brought bread and omelette on a plate. She said have a piece. I said I just had my lunch, there is no place in my stomach. How come you had lunch at your house. I said I took Sahithi to Churchgate, then we went to Loveleen's firm and came home. She asked why did you take her to Loveleen?

Loveleen offered her a position in her firm. She asked you just met her and she offered a position in her firm? I said Loveleen is thinking of shifting to Delhi, she wanted someone here to look after the firm, she thought she would make a good manager. She said let her have that I have my work.

I sat on the chair at the dining table. I asked her how is the work. She said as usual. Nothing much. I said you don't get scared of flying, I never flew. She said over time you get accustomed. To appease her I said if something happened to you I don't know what I will do. I might go to pieces. She lifted her head and looked at me to see if I am serious. I put my serious face and looked at her. She said what will happen to me, don't worry. I said don't think otherwise, after Sneha's accident I get scared easily. On that matter, we could not finalize anything. Shall we forget it as an accident? We don't have any more clues now.

I asked tomorrow is Independence Day do you have a duty? She said I am flying to Calcutta tomorrow. I will be operating from Calcutta for a week, there was a staff shortage there, so they are sending a few of us to Calcutta temporarily. I asked how long you would be there? She said Possibly for a month. I asked sadly how can I stay away from you for a month? She said just this time.

I said then come on let us have a go before you disappear for a month.

Completing our copulation, I lit a fag and said do you need to go to Calcutta? She said yes, it is compulsory. I have to resign to not to go there.

I said I have to go to the factory, I said to Kirit after lunch I will come back. She asked do you really had to go? I said I already told Kirit I will come back, he has gone out and no one is there at the factory. She kissed me and said goodbye, will see you after a month. I will give you a ring at the factory after my return. I said bye and went to the factory.

Kirit said on the occasion of Independence Day it will be a holiday tomorrow. I called Loveleen and asked do you have a holiday tomorrow. She said yes. I asked shall we meet tomorrow so you can explain the business to Sahithi, she also has a holiday. She said sure come over after 12. I said I would do that. She said call your friends also, we can have a party after we finish our work. I said sure I will call them to come after 4. She said ok come.

I called Sahithi and told her our plan for tomorrow is to go to Loveleen's house for an introduction to her business.

Kirit came after 1 hour. I asked did your work finished. He said done. I told him about the party at Loveleen's tomorrow evening. He said he will inform Mahira.

After my talk with Loveleen I have abandoned the idea of taking Mahira, it was one time and it has gone bad, I thought never with Mahira.

After finishing my work, I went home. I opened the door and Sahithi is playing with the children in the hall. I took each of them kissed and put them down. I called Chitti for a cup of tea. She went into the kitchen made and brought in 2 cups she gave me one and one to Sahithi. I asked Sahithi you did not have your tea. She said I am waiting for you.

I reminded Sahithi about going to Loveleen's house for orientation. She said I remember. I said I will also be there don't worry you did not pick up something. I will explain everything again. She nodded her head.

Completing tea, I got up went to the bathroom. Completing bath came to the bedroom wore a nightdress came into the hall sat down on the sofa. Atul came to me saying daddy. I lifted him onto my lap asked what do you want. He caught me at the neck put his head on my shoulder. I patted him on his back, he went to sleep on my shoulder. I said to Sahithi to take him to his bed. She took him away. I switched on the tv. I was watching the tv absentmindedly. Sunitha would be away for a month. What will I do? Sahithi becoming rigid on the bed. She must be having mental problems or tired all ways. I have to do something for this. I was also ignoring her from the time I met Sunitha.

Chapter 8

Sahithi

Today is August 15 1991. I think this is my independent day. I will be free from the tiring typing pool. I will meet Loveleen and she will explain the intricacies of her business and I will be in probation for three months and then she will leave the business to me and will go to Delhi. Then I will be independent, I don't have to take orders from anyone. I will be marking this day in my calendar as my independent day.

Kumar took me to her residence near Juhu beach. I asked him what is this area is called. He said it is Koliwada. I asked him do fishermen live here. I said I don't know they might have been living here in the past. Now this is the costliest area in Bombay. See this is actress Asha Parekh's house. Second bungalow to that is Loveleen's bungalow. See how nice it is. She said wow! What a bungalow, I have seen nothing like this. We opened the gate and entered. The door was open and we went and sat on the sofa. One servant came and gave us water and asked do you need anything to drink. Sahithi replied nothing and he went away. After five minutes Loveleen came and sat in front of Sahithi. First, I will explain what we do. We get orders from big shots around the Bombay. We have staff who checks the requirements from the clients and prepare preliminary order. After getting approval from the client we give them our estimates. We will not give them the final price. It will be only estimates. Until the work is completed we will not give the final bill. We collect our advances and the workers start their work. There will be different teams working on them. We hire them on contract. They will work on their part and we collect the payment. This way we don't have to employ highly skilled workers. Some non-skilled workers we employ in our regular employment like for example the painters I offered to send your home to paint. They will be used like this if they are free for a long time. They would not cost much for us and they better kept in regular employment. When a team's work is completed we collect the payment from the client and an advance for further works. These collections are very important for our survival. If they don't pay on time their works will be delayed. Except for our close friends or corporate giants, we will press them for payments. She explained to us what different teams would be doing. I looked at Kumar he is absorbing everything Loveleen had been explaining. After 2 hours the servant came and called for Lunch. We all went to the lunchroom. It is tastefully decorated. The table must have cost a fortune. I thought she calls the people for parties for the purpose of

getting more business. If they see this house they would expect their houses to be decorated like this.

We had our lunch and came back to the sofa in the hall. She continued to explain the intricacies of the business. How to handle the clients and so on. Then she asked me to ask questions. She said if you have no questions means you have not understood anything. First, Kumar started to ask questions. Then I started to understand things I started to ask questions and Kumar sat silent. He only interjected when I could not put something in words. We were discussing things like this when we were disturbed by the arrival of Kirit and Mahira. Then I remembered that Kumar said she called them for a party around 4 pm. We completed the item we were discussing went out to the beachside. There were some chairs and tables were arranged. We sat down and she sent some booze with the servant. The party went on up to 8 pm when we got a call for dinner inside the house. After finishing dinner, the three of them went out for a fag. I know Mahira smokes, I saw her many times with these two. Does she hang out with them for smoking and drinking? Sometimes I wonder. How do these people enjoy like this drinking and partying? As if they are born for this. Do I have to give out parties like this if she moves away? I don't know how to do this. I have to learn this also from her. Even though she is the host she hardly drank. She is holding the same glass for such a long time. This must be her mantra for giving the parties. Don't drink but make others drink. Listen to their stories, jokes, etc.

When everyone is ready to leave, Loveleen sent her driver to drop us. why does she do all this? Giving parties to us, what are we in her life. Just to employ me does she need to give parties? It may not be that, she might have a take on this. She must be investing in us, for what purpose, I have no idea.

Kumar

Sahithi always looks for something when someone does something for us. Why did Kirit take me in his factory? because he saw something in me, he looked at how I operate and offered me the job. Why Loveleen is interested in us. She must have seen something in us. She offered Sahithi to try out in her office. If Sahithi is successful in taking over from Loveleen then she can shift over to Delhi. She is hell-bent on going to Delhi, opening a branch there, settling down there. What is her interest in Delhi for her, this is Sahithi's question, not mine. I think her ex might be there, she might be trying to reconnect with him. I heard from Loveleen that they are only separated not divorced. Or she might be having friends there. She might be from Delhi. If she has been from Delhi, why

did she settle down here? All questions and we don't have answers. Somewhere along the line, we will get the answers for to our questions.

Now instead of dropping her at her office, I started to her drop her off at Loveleen's office. It seems she is picking up work fast. She is not a dumb person. The only thing was when she was having problems with her previous work was demanding. Now she can work leisurely and she started to enjoy the work. She used to go with the staff to understand how they work. How they are giving work orders and estimates. She is confident enough to offer her own input in their work. It seems with her input Loveleen found the firm's profitability has increased and she told Sahithi that. She also said she started to look for a place in Delhi for her branch. That means she has accepted Sahithi as the next in-charge for the firm.

I had a scare when on 16th August there was a plane crash near Imphal. The plane was going to Imphal from Calcutta. Later we came to know Sunitha was not there on that plane. But still a little scared. I scolded her when she returned back that see you scared me when I heard about the crash, I thought I may not see you. She said I might have travelled on that plane, another air hostess wants to go to Imphal that day she got me replaced. Lucky for me and Unlucky for her. She kissed me and said you are my lucky charm, I thought of you before the journey when will I see you and I got replaced at the last minute. Thank you so much.

I was helping Sahithi settle down on her new job as Manager in the firm. Loveleen finally gave her the papers appointing her as manager and in charge of the firm. I started helping her whenever possible. I used to drop her and wait an hour and look after the running of the firm. Then I would go a little early to her office and wait until closing down helping Sahithi out. Loveleen saw me helping her out. She must have thought if I had asked him, he would not help but for Sahithi I am helping out. It is correct.

Loveleen called us and said I need to go to Delhi for finalizing the offices there would you come with me? I hesitated, Sahithi said go, if she is asking why are you hesitating. You can always ask Kirit for a week's leave. He can look after the factory. I have reservations about going with Loveleen but Sahithi encouraged me to go with her thinking she will be the new boss here and wanted to check it out albeit for a week how it would be for being a boss. I have agreed to go with Loveleen for Sahithi's sake, thinking I will miss my next week with Sunitha. After coming back from Calcutta, she was more considerate with me than before. She is more loving and less demanding. I started to enjoy her company at least one

day a week. It has also become my weekly off. I explained my position with Sunitha and he gave me permission to use my time as I seem fit. So, I am spending my whole day with her and going back to sleep at Sahithi's.

I packed my suitcase, with Sahithi went to Loveleen's house. She said I could not get plane tickets so I booked for us in Rajdhani Express. Hearing the train name something struck in my mind but I could not place it. She said we will leave here after 3 and we can reach by 4 to Bombay central. I said ok by me.

The driver dropped us at Andheri station from there we took a local train to Bombay central. The train was on the platform and we sat on our seats. It is a first-class 2 berth coupe. After sitting on the train, I felt a *déjà vu*. As if I took this train journey before. But I have never been to Delhi before and I never travelled in first-class before. In sleeper class, the backrest goes up to make a middle berth. Here the backrest becomes berth. There are small lights for reading and the door can be closed shut and locked for safety. It was a new experience for me. I sat folding my legs under me and sat comfortably. Loveleen said if you want to you can sleep on the upper berth. I said I don't want to sleep now. I feel like I have taken this journey many times before. She asked did you take it with me? I said I can't remember. She sat down beside me and took out some papers from her bag and started to study them. The train started and it crossed Virar station in no time. I sat looking outside through the tinted glasses. As the stations passed I took out a book from my bag and looked at the name, it is *An Ace up my Sleeve* by James Hadley Chase. I like his books there is a crime, mystery and everything that makes putting down the book until finished difficult. I started reading the book. The story is about Helga Rolfe who is rich and a business woman like Loveleen. While reading I started seeing similarities with Loveleen. But the similarities stopped there in the story she was 43 and Loveleen is younger to me. Reading for some time I put aside the book and looked at Loveleen. She was seriously studying the papers. Seeing me looking at her she said five minutes as if to say she is sorry for looking at papers when I am here. I thought she is giving me some priority. Completing the reading she put back the papers in her bag and looked at me as if to say tell me. I looked at the time it is around 7 pm. I asked so what is next? She said dinner will come around 8 and then we can go to sleep. I saw an invitation in her eyes. I started asking her questions about the office we are going to look at. What area, how is Delhi, etc.

She said it will cold in Delhi, did you bring any hot clothes. I said I never used a sweater in Bombay, I just have this blue and black T-shirt. She said let us do some shopping in Delhi. I said ok. Then the topic went to Sunitha. I said I got

scared when the flight went down near Imphal, she was supposed to travel in that. She asked do you love her. I said I don't know. I can't understand what kind of relationship I have with her. She gives me what I want and I give her what she wants. It is mutual understanding. Loveleen asked do you spend money on her? I replied Only for groceries and vegetables. That also we use for parties there with Kirit and Mahira. She asked do you have many parties? I said we try to cram as many parties as possible. Kirit gets booze and I arrange for eatables. She asked Mahira? I said she is for company. Kirit and Mahira are an item. She asked do you join them. I said no, once I tried and Sunitha came unexpectedly and I never tried it with Mahira. I told you before how Sunitha made a big issue out of it. But after that, she has changed. She never spoke to me angrily. It has become a different relationship with her. I feel she is scared I will leave her and go. She does not have a hold on me except our weekly relationship. She asked if you had to go away from Sunitha how do you feel? I asked why do I go away from her. She said take for example I take you to Delhi and you can't meet her, how would you feel. I thought a minute and replied I don't know, until that happens one does not know. She said ok, then tell me how does it feel to meet her after coming back to Bombay. I thought what she is implying by that. I said she was away for a month to Calcutta, I did not feel any different. I did not miss her if what you are implying. She said yes, that is what I wanted to know. Now the discussion turned to Sahithi. She asked how long were you married to Sahithi? I replied something like three and half years. She asked why did you not have any children with her. I said she was scared of childbirth, she saw her friend die in childbirth and was scared to give birth. She said she don't want any children of her own. She thinks of Atul and Reena as her own. She said oh, that is the reason for you not having any other children. You did not have any family planning? I said Sahithi takes some pills I don't know much about them. She asked does Sunitha wants children? I said we have not discussed about children, we are not married and that topic never came up. She used to like my children then when she got the flat she stopped to come to our house to visit them. She asked do you plan on marrying her at any time? I don't know that topic also never came up. Our relationship is like friends with benefits. We enjoy each other's company, that is all. Until she is working as an air hostess she would not think of marriage. Maybe afterwards she looks for a man who she can marry. She might have reservations about finding a man who can satisfy her in bed. She would say sometimes I don't want anyone else, after you there can be no one. Sorry, I am going somewhere else. I don't want to brag but she says I am a marvellous lover. Sahithi became rigid sometime after Sneha's death. She might still think she is the reason for Sneha's death. She

asked why would she think like that? She had a quarrel before I took her to look after the hotel, it was to help Kirit and Mahira. But she thinks due to her quarrel I took her to the hotel and she had that accident. She feels it is her fault, Sneha had the accident. She was not responding in bed from that time as before. May that be is the reason I was pulled to Sunitha. Even knowing I might be involved with Sunitha, she did not get angry with me and never admonished me, and never cared about her and my relationship. She said that must be the guilt she is carrying. You should do something about it. I said if we solve her death, it would automatically reduce her guilt knowing she died for some other cause rather than due to Sahithi sending her away. She asked where were you with your investigation. I said it is in an impasse, we don't know how to move forward. We have exhausted all the clues we had. Until we find a new clue we don't know what we can do. She asked we means? We are all looking into this me, Kirit, Mahira and Sunitha. Sunitha even went to Andhra with my brother to eliminate the clue of the Sneha family. She said so all of you are involved in finding the culprit of Sneha's death. I said yes, we are all looking into that.

There is a knock on the door and I got up and opened the door, it was the train attendant, he had brought our dinner. I took them and he went away.

I put them on the stand and we started having our dinner, after completing our dinner washing our hands we came back to the seats. I placed the plates outside so as not to be disturbed by the attender again. I locked the door and sat down on the seat. She said tell me about your parents. I said my father works in the Telecom department as Chief accountant. My mother is a housewife. My brother has some kind of electronics business, I don't have details of the same. My sister is married and stays in Hyderabad. She asked what about your grandparents. I said my paternal grandfather has died when my father was young. And my maternal grandfather was a doctor. In fact, our grandfathers are Ayurvedic doctors. My father and his brothers are all govt servants. Our cousin brothers are a mixed lot. I thought why she is asking all this about my family, maybe she is asking just for conversation sake. She asked where do your parents stay? I said at Wadala quarters. They have a beautiful place there. Triple bedroom, big hall. Park, security etc. My father is also secretary for the Society and we have some perks for that. She changed the subject and asked why did you not study further after your degree? I said my marriage with Sneha has something to do with it. After completing my degree, I came over here and started working with Kirit. My aim was to save money to buy ourselves a house. I used to work hard and saved hard. Then Sneha went away I lost interest in life, at that time Sahithi came into my life. She had a house given by her

grandmother and she was renting it out. She got the house vacated for us and we started living together. I spent my savings in providing her comforts like gas, washing machine, tv and dining table, sofa etc. then I lost the urge to save and started spending. I reduced working hours and used to spend with Sahithi, then Sahithi asked for companionship, then we decided to marry. I asked her to marry me in night then the next day we were married at a temple. My mother made all the arrangements. She asked so you married Sahithi with your parent's approval? I said yes, they were there at the marriage ceremony. Sneha also I married with their approval but they were not present. They were angry with Sneha so they agreed to our marriage willingly and they made all the arrangements. Kirit could not attend as he was working at Nasik. She asked what he was doing at Nasik. I said that is another story. Mahira, Dolly and Kirit went to Nasik to start a factory like we have here. Kirit is supposed to order machinery and Dolly's contract is supposed to make the payments. Mahira is supposed to market. Then when the factory was ready, police took Kirit into custody on a complaint from the bank. Sneha just returned that day with the twins. I dropped her at Sahithi's place and went over to Nasik. Brought him back to Bombay and went back to enquire what really happened. From Mahira, I got to know that Dolly is part of a gang cheating the bank with loans. I and Mahira returned to Bombay in the middle of the night. And let the lawyer deal with the bank and police. From that time Mahira became part of our team. She asked in the first place how do you know Mahira? I said they were conducting marketing people for our neighbour. She was one of the people who came for the interview and I asked her what interview she came for. She later came and struck a conversation with us. then again, she came to us on some pretext or other. Then she brought us some orders and we became friends. She took us to Dolly party and Kirit got involved with Dolly and she offered him the job of setting up the Nasik factory. After the debacle of the Nasik, we kept our relations going. Then she got a job at the courier company. We continued our friendship with her through thick and thin. We had lots of parties together, we had lots of ups and downs and still, we are a team. She said you and your friends have lots of stories between yourselves. How long you were all friends. I said now it is nearly six and half years since I came to Bombay after completing my degree when I met Kirit. Maybe after six months, we have met Mahira.

Loveleen said What other stories are you holding. I said all my stores completed. You tell me your story. Where are you from? She said I am born and brought up in Delhi. My parents fixed my marriage with Gurvinder Singh. Everyone calls him Guru. After marriage, we came to Bombay. He was having many businesses. Through his contracts, I started this interior decorating firm. It is running very

well. But our home life was a wreck. He was not a man I expected. I was fed up with him and he went over to Delhi. I am staying in Bombay. I asked why are you going to Delhi now, to be close to him? She replied it is nothing like that, I have lots of contacts there and they were asking me to start providing services there after seeing my work here. I thought I could be closer to my parents and friends. I feel alone here in Bombay. That's why I give parties and ask you guys to come and have the party at my place. After seeing your kids, I felt a motherly feeling in my heart. I wanted to have kids, I will try once more with my husband. If he mends his ways and gives me kids I might think about staying there else I will think about it then. I asked is your ultimate goal is to have kids? She replied at the present time I feel it is my immediate goal. Let us see what happens in the future.

I looked at the time it is nearing 12. I said I think we should go to sleep. I arranged the beds and I climbed the top berth and she slept on the lower berth.

I heard the knock on the door got down and opened the door. It is the train attendant. He brought the coffee. I collected the coffee pot and cups and put them on the counter and woke up Loveleen. I went out brushed my teeth and came back. I poured two cups gave her one and took one myself. I packed our bags and put them aside.

The train is on time and we got down at Delhi station caught a cab and reached our hotel. I asked why hotel why not go to your parent's place. She said it is only preliminary. I have not informed my family about my intentions. I don't want to raise their hopes. Also, you are also with me, I don't want to keep you at a hotel and myself at home. She already got the booking done and she collected the keys and we went to our room. When we entered the room, when the boy left, I asked her you booked only one room. She said we can manage, no problem. It seems she wants to keep me close, otherwise, it would not be much problem for her to book a room for me. I put the luggage aside and took out a dress went to the bathroom for a bath. I had the bath come out with a towel around my middle and wore a dress came and sat on the sofa. I picked the newspaper on the table and started reading it. From the corner of my eyes, I saw her going to the bathroom. I heard the sound of the bathroom door opening looked up and she is wearing a blouse and petty coat and came out and wore her saree. I keep reading the newspaper. She picked the phone ordered breakfast came and sat down. When the waiter came with the breakfast I went and opened the door he came in and placed them on the table. She signed the bill and returned it. We had our breakfast and then tea. I asked what next. She said I am waiting for a call then we can go look at offices. After possibly half an hour later the call came

and she noted down the address and said let us go. I went with her, when we reached the door the doorman asked do you want a cab mam. She said yes, he signalled a cab and we went to the address. We looked at the offices and it seemed to be appropriate. But she was not fully satisfied she asked some questions and said she will return and we came out. As she knew better her requirements I did not question her. She started walking and I followed her like a dog. She went to another office and she looked over and she seemed satisfied with the office and she enquired about the rent and other things. I know she would have it decorated by her people we came out she looked around and she started walking and came to a restaurant and we both went in sat at a table. I looked at her expectantly she would say something. But she seemed filled with her own thoughts did not say anything. I said a penny for your thoughts. She came out her reverie and said what? I asked what are you thinking? She replied I am thinking am I taking correct step coming over here. Previously I thought coming over here and getting back to my husband would solve my problems. But thinking back to the past, I don't feel I should get back with my husband. I said Sahithi would be disappointed. She said don't worry, I would not take back her job. She has picked the job brilliantly, I would like to keep her doing the job, I can take a little breather. I am planning something else for myself. As she did not elaborate I did not press her for details. She asked do you want to eat anything, I said no. She ordered tea and we drank silently paid the bill and came out. We caught an auto and went to her friend's place. She sat me out and went inside and they were there for a long time. By the time she returned I was feeling drowsy. She said let us go, it seems after discussions with her friend, she must have come to a conclusion. We went to a restaurant had our lunch returned to the hotel.

We went into the room, she threw the chappal aside and put down the handbag aside sat on the sofa and covered her head with both hands. I went and sat beside her. I waited for some time. I touched the back of her head and asked what happened? She did not move for some time. I kept stroking her head. She lifted her head and touched her eyes with a tissue and said nothing. Even though I don't have that much closeness with her, I said please tell me. She looked at me, she must have found some solace in my face, she put her head on my lap and started to weep inconsolably. I let her cry by stroking her head with my hand.

She removed her head from my lap and went to the bathroom washed her face and came back and sat beside me. I looked at her expectantly, she might explain why the sudden outburst? She said coming here did not work out as I expected.

My past started to catch up with me here. What I have endured in Bombay have started to rise up and I have lost my control. I asked what happened in Bombay. It was my ex, he abused me after the marriage. He would not touch me but he would bring his friends to our house for a party and they would start to flirt with me. He has become a pimp and I had complained to my family and his family. I don't know what his family told him, he went away to Delhi. They might know about him all along, thinking he will change they arranged his marriage with my family. I became a victim in this charade. I asked so, you are not divorced? She replied no, he just went over to Delhi. I asked then why would you think coming back to Delhi would solve your problems? She replied I really don't know people who were close to me advised me to come to Delhi to solve my problems. But coming here had an adverse effect on my mental state. I caught her head and pulled her closer to me and held her. I said don't worry we will return back, we should not think of opening a branch here. We will look somewhere else to open a branch. I was telling all those words to calm her down and to give her a sense of belonging. I know at this moment she was feeling all alone without any support. She might be scared remembering all those times in Bombay with her husband. She let me hold her head in my hands for a long time. I was talking rubbish just to console her. She moved her head from my hands and I let go of her. She kissed me on the cheeks and sat back on the sofa. I did not react to her kiss thinking it might be her way of saying thanks. I took the tv remote and switched on the tv. News started on the tv. We were just watching absentmindedly. One news item caught my attention. An Air India vehicle transporting staff had overturned on the highway and many were injured. I got up and called the Air India office and asked about Sunitha. They said she is one of the passengers. I asked for the hospital they were put in and asked Loveleen for permission to go to the hospital. She told me she will also come. We went down to the hotel lobby and seeing us hurrying the doorman signalled for a cab and asked Loveleen do you want a cab mam, she nodded her head. We sat in the cab in front of the door and told him to take to the hospital. We enquired at the reception and got the room number where Sunitha was put up. We went to her room and the nurse asked us about us. I said she is my fiancé and I was luckily in Delhi today. She said she is not grievously injured and would recover in one or two days. Seeing me Sunitha was surprised and said how are you here? I said we have come here on some business when I heard about the accident I came running to see you. She asked in a whisper who is with you? I said She is Sahithi's boss Loveleen. She started with her firm recently. I told Loveleen she is Sunitha. Loveleen said glad to meet you, Kumar told me a lot about you. She said to me you did not tell me about her. I asked her do you need anything. She

said nothing. I am well looked after. I gave her our hotel no and said if you need anything call me, we will be here for another two to three days. The nurse came and told me the visiting hours are finished come back tomorrow. I told her I have given her my phone number if she needs anything please call me. She looked at the number on the side table said ok, I will give you a ring if she needs anything.

We went back to the hotel room. Loveleen asked why did you say you are her fiancé? I said so they would give us some priority. If I had said a friend, they may not have let me see her. I rang up Sunitha's sister in Madras and said I have visited Sunitha she is ok. She asked what are you doing in Delhi? I said I am on business related work here when I heard about the accident I went and visited her and said to her to call me if she needs anything. She said thanks for the information, cut the call. I thought why she is speaking very distantly with me. I have just provided the information that she is safe. It seems Sunitha's family have some doubts about her. Latha might be thinking that I had come with her to Delhi. Maybe that is why she was talking with me like that. Ok, I don't have any problem with her, let it be.

I came and sat down on the sofa. Loveleen went to the bathroom. I sat there looked blankly at the tv. My mind is on Loveleen's problem. What kind of person would do that to his wife. I heard stories of this kind in poor people homes. One person had lost his wife in playing cards and asked his wife to sleep with the player to whom he has lost. Another has asked his wife to go with him. But now it is the first time I am hearing this kind of thing in high society. I heard of other kinds of stories in high societies, wife swapping, threesome, etc.

She came back to the room and sat down on the sofa. I asked her do you have your husband address here? She said yes, but for what? I said I wanted to study him, to find out what is his problem. She asked how would you do that. I said I will go meet him as someone else. She gave me the address. I said I will be back in an hour and came out of the hotel took an auto to the address. It is a bungalow with a tall compound wall. I went to the gate and knocked a watchman looked out through a hole in the wall. He said in Hindi whom do you want to meet? I said Gurvinder ji. He asked who are you. I said I came from Bombay one of his friends send me. He called on the intercom and said opened the gate and let me in. He closed the gate and told me to follow him. He took me inside and one servant took over from there. He took me to an office room and Guru was sitting behind a table. He asked me what do you want. I said one of your friends from Bombay referred you. We provide services you might be interested in. He asked what kind of services. I lowered my voice and said call

girls, escort services, family women, etc. He asked who is my friend who referred you. I can't say, sir, he has used our services and is satisfied with it and when he came to know we are expanding to Delhi gave your reference. He thought for a minute and said I don't need your services for myself, I might know some people who need them. Give me your number I will give you a call. At present we don't have a number here. If you give me your number I will give you a call tomorrow. He looked suspiciously at me. I said we have not opened here, we are planning our operations here. Once we start off I will give our contacts. We have to be discreet so we open our firm in a dummy company, which might take some time. We don't want people enquiring into our operations. I was telling him what comes into my mind. I thought it would be a wonderful operation to start a business in Delhi, but it is dangerous also. I thought this kind of business is not for me, might be for people like Dolly, remembering how they cheated banks.

He gave me his card with his office and house numbers. I said thanks sir and came out. I caught an auto reached the hotel and went to our room. She is sipping on some drink. I looked at the bottle it is gin. I asked you drink gin. She replied it is called ladies drink, it won't smell as bad as other drinks. So, ladies prefer this. I brought a glass and said pour me a peg. She put some gin and poured limca into the glass. I sipped a little and said tastes good. She asked what happened? I said I could not read him. I told him we supply call girls, escort services and family women. She asked family women? I said I read somewhere family women get into this business for earning extra money. He told me he doesn't need these services and he would refer his friends and asked me for my number. I told him we don't have a number yet and took his number to call tomorrow. She asked is he expecting a call tomorrow? I think he would certainly expect a call from me.

What is your plan? She asked. I said I don't have a plan, go as it happens. I will do whatever is required of me. Let me see what he wants.

I refilled my drink and started sipping it. I said so what do you do other than run the interior decoration company. She said nothing much other than giving parties. My parties are a rage in our circles. What is the speciality? I asked.

She said the location itself is the rage. Beachfront is preferred by many. How did you keep the house, when he went over to Delhi? He did not come back from Delhi. I continued staying there. We did not have any contact after that. Completing my drink, I put aside the glass. Shall we order dinner or go to the restaurant? She said better go to the restaurant. We went over to the

restaurant. There is a waiting for tables and he said to wait for ten minutes, we will provide a table for you. We sat on the sofa provided for waiting guests. I picked a magazine on the table there.

There is an ad for computers, when I looked at the ad I felt a little nagging in my mind I should get one. I showed Loveleen the ad and said I want one of these. She asked do you know how to operate? I said I never touched one, but I feel I know how to operate computers. She asked What will you do if you have a computer? Maybe I will keep the tabs on outstandings. Prepare accounts, maybe something like that. The waiter came and told us the table is ready, we went and sat down ordered. We had our dinner went back to the room.

Loveleen asked what are you planning for tomorrow? I said I will call him and see his reaction then will decide. We watched tv for some time then she went and slept on the bed and I slept on the sofa.

We got up ordered coffee and when it arrived I opened the door and he put it on the table. I fixed two cups and I gave her one and took one myself. I went to the bathroom and had a bath and dressed and sat on the sofa. I was thinking about how to go forward with Guru, the telephone rang. It is Sunitha, she said she is being discharged today and she will go back to Bombay and she was given a week's leave by the airlines. She asked me when are you expected back in Bombay? I said I don't know at this moment as we are planning something. I said you come to the hotel after discharge we will see how it goes. I called up Guru and he said he had a proposal and told me to come to his home. I said to Loveleen Guru told me to meet me again, so he must have planned something. And Sunitha is coming to the hotel, keep her in the room. She might come in handy.

I went over to his house and this time the watchman opened the gate let me in. the servant took me to his office. After the servant left he looked me up as if weighing me and said I have a proposal for you. At present, you don't have an office here. You give me your contacts here I will manage them and you will receive your commission. I acted as if I am thinking of accepting or not. Finally said it is not possible to do it that way. It seems he wants to start his acts of Bombay here. He said this is the only way I can accept your offer. I said I can't give you my word without consulting my boss. Give me some time. He said if you have any connection here let me meet them. I said I have one girl here, but she met with an accident and I dropped her in the hospital and came here. If you want to just meet her I can arrange a meet at my hotel. I will pick her up and take her to the hotel lobby you come and meet her there. But she will not

come with you now. She is in a lot of pain and with bandages. I don't know how she is looking but took a chance of telling him that to keep her away from him. I just want to use her as a stooge. He said ok, I will come and meet us in two hours. By the time I returned to the hotel room, Sunitha was already there and sitting on the sofa. I went in gave her a hug and looked her over. She was reasonably ok, only one of two bandages on her head and she had her hand on a sling. I thought it perfect for our operation. I explained our operation to her and explained it is only for the purpose of showing off. Don't get scared. As she is always ready for action she agreed without persuasion. I said to Loveleen don't come down at all. We will be sitting in the lobby. When we are finished I will come and inform you. I made small changes to her face so that he will not recognize her again if he comes across her. He might be travelling and I don't want him to trouble her. I looked over her and finding her unrecognizable from her original self, we both went and sat in the lobby. He came over after some time. He looked her over and asked her name. She said Sumitra. He said nice name, would you work with me? She asked what kind of work? He said to entertain guests at the parties. Serve drinks generally act as a hostess of the party. She said like your companion. Don't you have a wife? He said she is not here, she is in Bombay. She does not like Delhi weather. I thought what lies, she is born and brought up in Delhi and she does not like Delhi weather?

I did not speak and let them discuss things. She said I don't sleep with anyone, especially you. He said you don't have to sleep with me, if you fancy anyone it is up to you. She said it might take one or two weeks for me to be available to show her hand sling. He said it is ok and gave her his card and said keep in touch. He told me to keep in touch and went away. We returned to our room and I asked Sunitha what is your take about him. she said I think he wants to use girls in his business somehow. Maybe take photos in compromising positions and blackmail them to get his works done. I looked at Loveleen she said I agree with your opinion. He might be using girls in his business somehow. I asked Loveleen what shall we do. We took a weeks' time for him to proceed any further. She said let us go back to Bombay. I asked Sunitha when is your return flight. She said there is an 8 pm flight I might get a seat for myself. I looked at Loveleen she said check if you can get another two seats for us. She rang up her office and checked if a seat available for her. When they said it is available, she asked if another two tickets are available for her friends who would like to accompany her. When it is available she said to book two tickets and she will make the payment once at the airport. They said if she does not make the payment 1 hour before opening the gates, it will be given to someone else. She said ok and turned to us the tickets are booked. We packed our suitcases and

asked the reception for checkout. We checked out of the hotel and left for the airport. We paid for the tickets and got boarding passes and went through the security and sat on the chairs waiting for boarding.

Sunitha asked what is this Guru's story? I said he is Loveleen's husband. He was troubling her when he was in Bombay. You have seen what he is expecting from you. He tried that with her. She complained to her family and his family, then they called him back to Delhi. From that time, she was living in Bombay alone. She thought of going to Delhi, offered Sahithi the post of manager and she wanted to open a branch in Delhi. But when she reached Delhi she was scared and consulted her friends and found that he had not changed his ways. So, to check him out we played this drama of providing girls. He fell for the acting and he offered to run the operation for Delhi and he asked to see any girls with us. I said one of my girls has met with an accident and I left her at the hospital and came to him and offered to show you to him at the hotel. The remaining story you know. Sunitha asked will there be any problem in the future? I said that is the reason I made you unrecognizable and your injuries had helped us. Don't worry we see what to do later. First, we have to get away from him for the time being. Loveleen agreed with me.

When the call for boarding came we went and sat on our seats. I sat on the middle seat and both of them sat on either side of me. I asked Sunitha how did you feel when your bus met with the accident? She said I thought I am not going to see you again. I felt like it was my last moment on the earth. I was thinking about you only. Miraculously I did not have any injuries and came out with small scratches and this hand sprain. The doctor told me the pain in the hand would reduce within a week, that is why I got one week of sick leave. If the pain is not reduced in a week I can extend the leave. Looking at me lovingly that we can spend a week's time together.

The plane started to take off and we sat silent for the period of takeoff. When it is cruising I asked Sunitha did you get scared when I took you to him. She said what is to get scared, it was just acting only. You know I love adventure. If you want to follow up we can do that also. I said I am not going to involve you again in this. You are always flying and if he finds you on any flight it might be a problem for you, we will think of something else. Like making phone calls with someone else. The Air hostess has brought dinner, recognizing Sunitha, she said are you flying back. She said due to the accident she got leave. So, she is going back to Bombay. she introduced us as her friends. She gave us our dinner and went to the next seat.

We completed our dinner and handed the empty dishes back to the air hostess and sat back. Loveleen was talking about something I absentmindedly saying aha or yes or no. When we reached Bombay, we came out of the airport and Loveleen took a cab and went away. I said I will take you to your flat and we went to Sunitha's flat.

I handled her baggage and we opened the flat and went inside.

She put her hand on my shoulder and pulled me close and kissed me and said I really thought I won't see you again. Thank god I escaped unhurt. Another girl got seriously hurt and they are saying she needs to be in hospital for at least a month. Her leg broke and she might be out of duty for at least six months. I asked would she receive her salary? She replied yes but she will miss the perks.

I said there is a saying in Hindi "pran bachaya lako paaya". You have come back alive it is more than lakh of rupees. She kissed me and said come on let us go to bed.

Chapter 9

Kumar

It is a week after we returned from Delhi. Sahithi continued her work and Loveleen is taking easy with her work. She has let Sahithi take over the work. She would only supervise once in a while.

Sunitha was keeping at her flat and I daily go to her flat after dropping Sahithi at her work. I would help her in cooking as her hand is yet in the sling and we are enjoying each other's company. After lunch, I used to go to the factory. I explained what happened to Kirit and we decided to have a sitting at Loveleen's place on Sunday and decide what future action to be taken.

We all gathered at Loveleen's place on Sunday for a discussion. After dropping Sahithi at her place I went and brought Sunitha to her place. We all sat and I explained what we have done at Delhi in relation to Guru. How Sunitha helped us in the drama. Sahithi looked at me how Sunitha is involved in all this. I explained for her sake, how Sunitha met with an accident and how we went to visit her at the hospital and how we took her to meet Guru at our hotel. I explained what we conceived of his intentions and how should we counteract him. The servant brought a bottle and some glasses put them on the table. I poured some drinks in glasses who wants to drink took their glasses. The servant brought some eatables and placed them on the table. I looked around and none had something to contribute. I let them have their drinks, thinking they might come up with something after a peg. The bottle finished and none has come out with a plan. I asked each one does anyone has any ideas. None came up with anything. I looked around everyone has blank faces. I thought I had to do something. I asked Loveleen are you safe here? If Guru comes here, what will you do? She said she feels safe here. I don't think he will dare to set foot here. My father got him so scared he did not dare come to Bombay again. I asked then why did you not take divorce? You should have at least applied for divorce on cruelty. I said our family has some reputation to keep, they have asked me not to take such an action. Until then they can keep me safe, if I take such an action they can't help me. I thought this angle is also there. What should be done has to be done in Delhi only. I can't take the chance of sending Sunitha there. We have to find someone to send there as a proxy. I told our team this we have to find someone to send to Delhi to him to monitor his activities. It has to be someone professional either a call girl or someone like an investigator. I said let us think it over we will again meet in a week's time. The servant came to announce dinner is ready.

Chapter 10

The year 1992

Kumar

Sunitha and Loveleen were working together and they have taken the firm to the next level. Sahithi has proven her worth in this venture. But we could not solve two of the mysteries fallen in our lap, one is Sneha's death and the second is to trap Guru. We have taken a resolution that this year at least one of the mysteries will get resolved.

It is Atul and Reena's fifth birthday. This time Loveleen offered to host the party for us. As Sahithi is also involved with the firm now, she has agreed to the proposal. It works two ways, she can celebrate children's birthdays and she can meet the firm's customers. Loveleen's parties are very popular among the customers and future customers. Loveleen's place is also vast, beachfront and it can accommodate any number of guests. I don't know where she gets her liquor but she has a constant supply of drinks of all kinds.

It is 21st Jan and we have reached Loveleen house for making arrangements for the party. Last year it was low key and this year it is just the opposite. My brother said he will arrange the orchestra with his friend, it has become an added attraction. Overall there is a festive atmosphere in the air.

There is a sound of car stopping outside the gate and the car door opening and slamming. I looked through the window on the first floor. It is Guru who is standing at the gate. The gate was closed from him and he is banging on the gate. I ran to Loveleen and said Guru is here, you said he won't come here? If he sees me he will put two and two together. I am going from the beachside before he comes to the back. To come to the backside, he has to all around the bungalows beside this bungalow. I ran to the beach and went towards Juhu beach. There is a road which comes to the main road, I took the road and came to the main road. I saw a PCO some distance away. I went and called Kirit and told him the situation. Next, I rang up home and told Sahithi about Guru coming. I said we might have to cancel the party there and instead we will have it at our home. I stood there thinking what to do next. I saw the PCO boy looking towards me expectantly for payment I said I have to make another call. I called Loveleen's number this time. The servant lifted the phone, I changed my voice and said hello. He said hello, I said Loveleen madam is there in Hindi. He said I will call her in Hindi and went away. He came over and lifted the receiver I said

hello madam in a changed voice. She said who is calling? I said I am the caterer Kumar speaking madam. She understood and said tell me. I asked is he there? She said I have not allowed him inside. He made rounds of the house and went away. I asked what shall we do about the party, he might gatecrash the party? If he gatecrashes he will behave she said, I will call my dad. The problem is he will recognize me from Delhi. She said we will do one thing we will change the party to the masked theme, everyone should wear a mask and he won't recognize who is who. You come dressed as a server and if you see him start acting like a server. I said ok I will inform Sahithi and come there. I called Sahithi and informed her about the change of plans. We have to be careful of Guru only nothing else. I will arrange for someone to pick a fight with him and send him out of the house, he is very hot-headed.

We started the party as planned and the guests are arriving and we are handing them the masks to wear. Some wore them some just hold them in hand to mingle with other guests. The call to her father must have worked and Guru did not set foot into the party.

I asked after the party is Guru in Bombay or did he return. She said I don't know. I asked her shall I stay back here for the night? He might return in the night. She said no need for you to stay back. I don't get scared of him, if he comes and makes a scene I can always call the police. I said if you did not get a chance to call the police. She said I will lock the doors and my bedroom door also. I will not open under any circumstances. If I feel he was around the house, I will give you a ring, ok? I said I will keep awake for your call. She got us dropped at our house.

It is more than two months after the birthday party. The new financial year started and we are busy with finalizing the accounts. In a week's time, we closed our accounts and found we have increased the profits by twenty per cent against the last year. I called Sahithi and said we have increased our profits by 20 per cent this year. She said we are expecting our profits to increase by at least 50 per cent. I said oh, great, you are breaking our records. She said happily yes, we are. We took the finalized accounts to Mr. Trivedi. He said you two are doing good. From now on I will leave the factory to you two. You two take the decisions together and run the factory. I asked sir, does this mean you are taking retirement. He said no, I thought of doing something else. We are working on it. Now we have purchased a flat at Prabhadevi I want to get it remodelled. I said my wife is working with a firm, I will get it done at a cheaper price for you. He said to Kirit to take them to our new flat and get it checked and get a quote.

I called Sahithi and informed her about Kirit's new flat remodelling. She said she will go and check.

I told Kirit I will go out and come, it is a day off for Sunitha but she said she will return early in the morning. So, let her sleep it off for some time before going there. I opened the door and went inside. She is still sleeping. I thought sleeping beauty. I tapped her and said get up sleeping beauty your prince has arrived. She opened her eyes sleepily said then come over and give me a kiss. I went and gave her a kiss and said how long will you sleep. She said I just had four hours of sleep only. Then you can sleep later do you want something to eat? She said make something light, I will brush and come. She went into the bathroom, I went to the kitchen and looked around. There are Maggi packets on the counter. I went to the bathroom and shouted do you want to eat Maggi? She said ok. I went and prepared a packet of Maggi and brought it to the dining table. Again, went to the kitchen put on tea on the stove and came back. She came and started eating noodles. I asked her what news? She said some sad news. I asked what sad news? She said I am being transferred to Air India from Airlines. I said so, what is so sad about it? She said my timings will change. I have to fly abroad. I said now you are travelling around India next you will travel around the world, nice promotion. She said then I will not have weekly off like this. I might be here once in a fortnight only. I said then we will work a double shift on that day. She said you always think that. I said it is not that, I am happy that you get to see the world. I know I can't go out of this country, you go and fly for me also. She said you are so considerate of me. She said maybe if we had been married, you would also have got the chance to see the world. I said don't worry about me, I will manage here, go and fly all over the world. She said thanks. Come to the bedroom. I said first let us have tea.

Kirit told me to go to Panvel and to meet a customer. I said it is a little too far to go by my scooter. He said take my bike. So, I took his bike, met the customer and came back to the city. On the way, a car passed by me and I heard a call for help from the car. I increased speed and overtook that car and I heard the call for help again. I drove and found a PCO, I slowed the bike and stopped beside the PCO. I noted down the car no while it is passing me and called the police from the PCO. Informed them of the call for help and car no. I paid the PCO and started following them from afar. When the car reached an intersection the waiting police car stopped them. I stopped behind them. They checked the car and a girl was found in the car. I went to them and said that I called about the shout for help. They took the persons and the girl to the police station and told me to follow them there. In the police station, they took my statement and put

them under lockup. They took the girls address and said we will call you if the need arises. I came out with her and asked her can I drop you somewhere. I took her to the address mentioned by her. During the drive, I asked her for details. She said she is from Noida and she was brought here forcefully and they were using her as a call girl. But why are shouting for help? She replied they want me to go to a customer who is mean and not a good man. They were forcefully taking me there. Then why are going back to their place? If I don't go back they will find me and kill me. I said I have a proposition for you, if you agree to it I will send you to Delhi. What is the proposition she asked? I said whatever you doing, something like that, it is for a sting operation. We want to collect all the information from someone in Delhi. When the operation is complete you will be free. She said then take me somewhere else, I don't want to go back. I took her to Loveleen's house. Seeing the house, she was a little suspicious at first. But seeing Loveleen she asked what I have to do? I explained to Loveleen under what circumstances I brought her here. I explained to both of them my plan to trap Guru. I asked Loveleen if we get proof of what kind of man Guru is, will your father take action? She said at least he will get me the divorce I need. I asked What shall we do about her after that? If she wants to work with us we will give her some work, if she wants to go back, she can go back, whatever she thinks is right for her. I asked her what is her name. She said Dimple, she is from Sector 2, Noida. I asked her will you agree to our plan. She said if I can get away from them I will do whatever is needed. I said we need a car and a driver in Delhi. Loveleen said I will arrange for that. I said I will take Dimple to Guru and say She will act as his hostess for his parties. Our driver will always be with her and he will collect the information and we will bring her back here. She said I will arrange a flat for you and a car and driver in Delhi, when do you want to go there. I as soon as possible, you get what is required and I will take her there and make introductions, wait for some time. If we can finish the work fast, I can bring her back or I will leave her there for some time and will go back when the work is finished. Loveleen thought for some time and said ok, we will go as per you plan. Dimple said It is okay with me. I told Dimple don't let him take advantage of you. He said he needed you as a hostess only. So, we will act as if we are providing you for that purpose only. Our driver will be there whenever you needed. I will be there for some time until the operation is smooth running if I think it is not safe we will abandon the operation, okay. She said okay, I am ready. I asked until then where we will keep her? Loveleen said she can stay here for the time being.

I took the bike and reached the factory. I explained our operation plan to Kirit. He said let us see how this works out.

After a week Loveleen informed us that all the arrangements are made in Delhi for a house, car and driver. She said she also got a phone for the house. I said it is a good idea to get a phone. She said she booked tickets to go to Delhi. I wanted to come with you but the work pressure would not let me get away. I said no problem, I will take care of everything. I called up Guru and told him that we are starting our operations in Delhi. I am bringing in my first girl there, shall I bring her to him. He said eagerly said bring her to me first. I said I would do that.

In the meantime, Loveleen took Dimple shopping and got her required dresses and partywear for her. She also gave her some dresses from her wardrobe.

Everything ready, Loveleen sent us to Bombay central by her car. We caught Rajdhani express and reached Delhi. Our driver was waiting at the station with the car. He said his name is Vishal. We went to the flat arranged by Loveleen and settled down. I called Loveleen we have arrived and settled down at the flat. I called Kirit and Sahithi informed them of my arrival.

The next day she got ready and we both went to Guru's house. The watchman opened the gate and let our car inside the compound. We went and met him and said to him we are starting our operations with this girl Dimple whenever you need her, you give her a call to this number. She will come over to whatever place you call her. Be careful with her, she is new to this. Be gentle with her. He must be thinking I am getting a fresh piece, let him think that. He agreed to our proposal and paid in advance. He said he is organizing a party tomorrow so tell her to be here. I said ok, for the time being, I going to accompany her to teach the game. He said ok, be there, but don't interfere in the activities. I said I will be discreet. I will be part of the decoration.

We went back to our flat. It is a single bedroom with a hall and kitchen. The kitchen is well stocked and the bedroom has two single beds. I think it will be good for us. She thought of everything. I asked dimple do you have any problem with me sleeping in the same room? She said I have no problem you being here. You are here for my protection, aren't you? I said I am there for you and driver Vishal will be there whenever you need him when I go back. She asked what do you do in Bombay? I said we run a factory in Bhandup. And I explained to her do and don't. Whenever they ask anything don't tell lies, you build your story around truth only. If you say one lie you will be forced to say a string of lies. One more thing about lies is you will tell one thing at one time and something else some other time. People will catch you at your lies. Say for example someone asks where are you from, what is your answer? I will say I am from Delhi. I said that is a lie, correct. You say you are from Noida, then he will ask from where in

Noida. You can say sector 2, then you can lie about the exact location or avoid telling them that. It is better not to tell anything rather than tell lies. She said she understood your idea of building around truth and not telling lies.

I coached about what do to and what not to do at the party. Don't approach anyone unless told. Don't act overfriendly, don't flirt unless the host says so. You always follow his lead. Act how he introduces you. He might introduce you as an Assistant, girlfriend or wife. Act accordingly, you can confirm with him before starting, if he asks why you are asking, you tell my name. This way we spent two hours. I know she know the tricks of the trade, but she never moved in high society. My aim is to teach her so that Guru should not come back to me what kind of girl you brought me. That is another reason I told him she is fresh. Then the driver brought dinner from the restaurant and we sat down for dinner.

After finishing dinner, Dimple went into the bedroom. I removed a packet of fags lit one and asked the driver if he wants one. He took one lit it. We sat there smoking.

I got up and rang up Sahithi and enquired about kids and chatted for some time. Driver asked are you married? I said yes, I have twins, a boy and a girl five years old. He asked what is your age. I said 26. You seemed to have married young. I said we eloped and married. He asked love marriage? I said yes, we studied intermediate for 2 years together when I went to Bombay for holidays her parents sent her away. Then when she became a major, I eloped with her and married. He asked what was your age then? We both were 18, I am months elder to her. He asked when did you have children. We were studying and working until I completed my degree and we came over to Bombay. then Kirit gave me a job in his factory, from then on, I am working there. He asked What about her story? Why did you bring her here and what is your plan? I said madam told you what you need to do? She told me, but I did not understand all this. I said madam married this Guru. He was acting all bad there and she complained to her parents and they called him to Delhi. He is staying in Delhi from that time. Now madam wants a divorce from Guru, her father is not listening to that. To get the divorce we have to discredit Guru and her father would accept her request to go for a divorce. Our job is to get the information to discredit him. He said now I understood. We need to get information on his villainous acts. I said exactly.

I took out a book from my bag and started reading. He asked do you read regularly? I said I always keep a book with me. Whenever I have free time, I read them. So, from these books, you get your ideas? I said some. He said I will sleep

on the sofa. I said I will go to the bedroom and went into the bedroom laid on the bed and continue reading. This book by James Hadley Chase and its cover name is Gold Fish have no hiding place. It's about a newspaper reporter and his boss who is the owner of a newspaper. While reading I slipped into sleep. I woke up when Dimple tapped me. I got up put the book away and asked what happened? She said I am getting scared. I said come and sleep here and moved a little turned other side and slept. She slept beside me put her hand on me and slept. I woke up and the time is after 6. Dimple sleeping beside me turned to the other side. I went to the bathroom and brushed, went to the kitchen and checked. There is milk in the fridge and I boiled a packet of milk and prepared a cup of coffee from a bottle of Nescafe and came into the hall. The driver is sleeping and I don't want to disturb him. I sat on the chair lit a fag and thought about what to do today. We have to wait until evening when we have to go to Guru's house. Before that, we have to be ready for the party.

After lunch, we started preparing the party. I and Dimple together choose her a dress. I showed her how to do makeup which Loveleen taught me. It took us two hours to make Dimple to be ready for the party. I looked her over satisfied that she would be perfect for the party. Asked Vishal to get the car ready. We reached Guru's house half an hour before the start of the party. I told Vishal to be at the wheel of the car and don't go away. We might have to take off at any time. Be ready to get out. Both of us went inside and were acclimatized with the things at the party place. I checked where the toilets are, where drinks are served and where the dinner is served. Where the guests were entertained. If any guest wants to take her anywhere where he would take her, things like that which will be useful when I want to track her. Guru came and gave instructions to Dimple on how to act with the guests. She asked him what he would introduce her as? He said he will introduce her as his PA.

The party has completed without any untoward incidents for Dimple. When the party had completed we heaved a sigh of relief. I brought Dimple out of the house and we returned back to the flat. Dimple has changed, removed the makeup went back to the bedroom. I asked her how are you feeling. She said tired but better. I asked her shall I put these beds together, you can sleep however you want. She said please. We put the beds together and we went to sleep. She got up in the middle of the night, put her hand on me and slept peacefully.

Sahithi

Last year the kids were in a small school. This year I want them to join a good school for their UKG. I wanted them to join St Anthony High School in Vakola. I thought I can put them there but they have to be left with my mother. Finally, I decided to join them in St Joseph High School nearby. This would be ideal for them, Chitti can drop and pick them up. I went to the school paid the fees and got admission for the children. As they are twins they will be in the same class. Up to now, Atul has the upper hand in everything, I have to see how they fare in their studies.

How long Kumar would be in Delhi? He said at least a week, why did he go there? He said Loveleen's work, what will she achieve sending Kumar there. I miss his companionship. I want him to be just there for me. I don't know why we're going physically distant for some time, is it from the time of Sneha's accident? Do I have some kind of guilt feeling about her death? Is it the reason Kumar goes on trips? This is his second trip to Delhi. On his trip, he went with Loveleen, this trip he has gone with some girl Dimple. After what story he has told about her, is it safe for him to go with her? Will she pull him into her wiles? Then what will happen to him? What does he do there in Delhi?

After going there, he rang up twice and spoke to me. Why he did not give me his number there? What should I do if have to call him on some urgent work, maybe Loveleen knows his number? I have to get it from her.

Kumar

I got up and fixed myself a coffee and sat at the table with my fag. Vishal got up and asked for a fag, I gave him the packet and he took one and lit it and went into the bathroom. I sat staring at my cup. Today he did not invite us to a party, when will the next party be? Do we need to wait until he organizes another party? What guarantee he will act differently at his next party? If not, how long do we need to be here? How will we gather some evidence of his misbehavior? I think we should get a small camera or something. Otherwise, how will we gather some incrimination evidence against him? Another thing we need is a small voice recorder, which Dimple can place in her handbag.

I told Vishal we need to go shopping. As we don't have any work today we will have a trip of Delhi. We do some sightseeing. He said ok. I went into the bedroom, Dimple is still sleeping. Seeing her sleeping peacefully, I couldn't wake her. I came back into the hall, sat on the sofa lit a fag.

Dimple came out of the bedroom after one hour, yawning. I asked did you have enough sleep. She said I could sleep another hour. I said look at the time, we

have to go shopping. She said I am coming in half an hour, get the breakfast ready. I thought am I making breakfast and told Vishal did you hear the madam. He got up and said I will go and get breakfast. I let her finish her bath and I went for a bath. After finishing the bath and dressed and came and sat at the dining table. I said what have you brought. He said chole bhature. Ok, give me a plate.

I finished my breakfast and had my tea and Dimple did not come for breakfast. I shouted Dimple when are you coming out? She said one minute. I shouted again when that one-minute fishes come for breakfast. She shouted back I told you I am coming. She came after half an hour. I said ok, come and have your breakfast, we are getting delayed. She said where are we going, only shopping, what is the problem? I said no problem we should be moving by now. She asked what are you buying for me. I said last week only madam got you whatever you wanted, what do you want now? She looked at me as if I am telling her no shopping. I said ok, I will get you what you want, come fast.

We sat in the car and Vishal asked where are we going? I said we need a camera and a small voice recorder, I think it is called Dictaphone. He said so, we need to go to the electronics market. We searched the market for our requirements and after going through six shops we found what we need. A small camera to fit my coat pocket and a small Dictaphone. We checked how the Dictaphone works. We placed it in her handbag and recorded what we are speaking. Satisfied that it can record our voice from 5 feet away we purchased it and came out. We went to a photo studio and brought a few high-speed camera rolls. High speed because it can take photos in low light also. Sat in the car and told Vishal to show us the sights of Delhi.

We came back to the flat around 7 pm, after seeing some sights and doing shopping for Dimple. I changed went to the kitchen prepared a tea for myself and came into the hall sat down and lit a fag. Now, when will he give us another invitation to the party?

It is after two days we got the invitation. Guru said there is a party at a five-star hotel, be there by 5 pm. I said ok and noted down the venue. I informed Dimple and Vishal about the party and told them to be ready for the party.

We were doing sightseeing of Delhi for the last two days and putting our camera for good use. I removed the reel from the camera gave it to Vishal for washing and printing. He took them and went away.

I gave the Dictaphone to Dimple and said put it in your purse on the outer zip. If he takes you anywhere else switch on the recorder. If you don't get to switch it

on, tell him you need to use the toilet and switch it on and come. Please record important conversations. That is important for our mission.

We got ready and reached the party before time. I sat on a side and watched the goings and comings of the guests. Where ever possible I took a few shots of the important people in the room. Guru called Dimple and took her up the stairs. I followed at a distance. He took her to the first floor and they went into a room. I followed them and noted the room number. I tried to listen from outside, could not hear anything. I thought if possible Dimple will record, went to the lift and sat down on a sofa there looking over the room he took her. He came out after half an hour. Seeing me he asked what are you doing here? I said looking after my investment, I told you she will not do these kinds of things. Don't do anything without my permission and went to the door and knocked. Dimple came and opened the door, I pulled her out took her out of the hotel to where our car was parked. Seeing us Vishal started the car and drove us to our flat.

After reaching the flat I asked her did you record anything? She said I kept it switched on, I don't know what is recorded. I took the Dictaphone, it is still recording. I switched off the recording and rewound the tape. I started playing from the beginning. There were some normal introductions and I forward tape a little and heard. Still normal goings are recorded. I forwarded a little and played. There was Guru's voice, I rewound and played. Now Guru's voice calling Dimple to come with him. I let it play. He knocked on the door, there was a voice distantly telling come in. The other person said what do you want. Guru said I am coming on behalf of Sumith Constructions. It is about the tender for the complex. He asked do you want the tender, what is our commission. Guru said 10. He said ok pay 5 koka now and 5 after getting the contract. If you don't get the contract you will get the 5-refund excluding our expensed. He said ok I will send it over tomorrow. He said give it to my PA Dinakar, you know him, no. Guru said I know him sir, ok sir will meet you again. He said who is she? Guru said she is my PA sir. He said Leave her here and come after half an hour. Guru said Ok sir and opening and closing of the door. Then after a minute I knocked on the door spirited her out.

I said very good recording. I will get it transferred to tapes. Told Vishal let us get this transferred to tapes. We went to a nearby recording shop and got them transferred and made number of copies. Then we went to a courier company and send a copy to Loveleen and a copy to our factory for safety. Took the remaining copies and came back to the flat. I called Loveleen and explained what we have achieved. I told her I sent a copy to your office address.

Tomorrow morning you collect and listen to it. Then you can instruct us what to do. She said ok and cut the call. I said to Vishal our mission successful let us have party. He went and brought a bottle and eatables. We partied and slept off.

Loveleen rang after 11 am. I just got up with a hangover. I lifted the phone and said hello. She said she heard the recording and told me to take it to her father and gave me his address and telephone no. I am calling him to expect you. Go there and hand over the tape to him and tell what he tells you to do. I said ok and cut the call. I told Vishal to get ready we have work to do. I went had bath dressed and came. Vishal is ready with the breakfast rather brunch. We ate it and said let us go the address. We went over to the address. When I told my name, the watchman said you are expected and let us in. We went in and his PA came over took the tape from me. He told me to sit down and went away. He called me after an hour. I went and met Loveleen's father. He asked where did you record this. I said at the party at the hotel. Do you know who is speaking on the recording. I said one person is Guru and another voice I don't know. He said ok, you can go, you tell Loveleen thanks from my side. I said thanks and came out and we were back to the flat. I called Loveleen and told her about our conversation. She said you can now come back with Dimple. It is better you take the night flight. I said to Vishal to go and book two tickets for us to go back to Bombay. he went out to get tickets. I told Dimple to pack her bags and be ready to go back to Bombay. I packed my bag and kept it ready. Vishal came back with the tickets, I said let us go and put the bags in the dicky and left for Bombay. we reached Bombay around 12 midnight. Loveleen sent her driver to the airport. We reached Loveleen house and narrated to her the events of the day.

She said sleep now, we will see tomorrow.

Loveleen sent me coffee. I looked at the time it is 10 am. I drank the coffee and came out. Loveleen is sitting on the sofa going through some papers. I asked why didn't wake me up before. She said you were late to go to bed, so, I let you sleep. I asked did Dimple wake up? She said I let her sleep. You might want to go home. I said yes if you can send me with the driver. She said certainly and called the servant and told him to take my luggage to the car. I said thanks give me a call and went home.

I took the luggage from the car reached the door and opened the door with my key. Sahithi is sitting on the sofa and waiting for me. I asked you did not go to the office. She said Loveleen said you have returned last night, I was waiting for you to come, then I can go to the office. I said give me a cup of tea, then we can have lunch. She said ok, went into the kitchen to make tea. I sat on the sofa,

switched on the tv. There was some program coming on the tv. When the program finished news started. I was watching it absentmindedly. When one news item caught my attention. The newsreader said that the Haryana minister has resigned due to some corruption charges and the state cabinet is under threat of coming down. I thought was it our doing? But why the minister, it was supposed to be Guru who was to be punished. I called Loveleen and asked did you see the news? She said yes, thanks to you our mission accomplished. I asked what about Guru, why he is not punished? She said his punishment will come, and did not elaborate. She said we will have a party this Saturday. I said ok and cut the call. I sat down and thought are we being played by Loveleen? What if she is used us to gain some political mileage? What can we do now? If we confront Loveleen, Sahithi's career is at stake. What did I lose, some time and some brains for planning? I am sure she would pay us back in some way. Dimple will have a good life. That is all I want. One person can have a good life on my account, I have accomplished my mission.

I called Kirit and said after lunch I will drop Sahithi at her office and will come to the factory. I also told him about the party at Loveleen's house on Saturday. He said we will come and he will inform Mahira also.

Sahithi called me for lunch. After lunch, I said I will drop you and go to the factory. She said the driver is waiting down I will go with him, you can go to the factory. When did you call Loveleen, she said when you are having a bath. I said ok then. Took my scooter keys and went over to the factory. I explained to Kirit the events leading to the Haryana Minister resigning. He asked what is Loveleen's take on all this? I said I don't know exactly what is her idea. But let us wait and see what happens. We immersed ourselves in the work.

On Saturday evening we reached Loveleen's house. She made arrangements for a grand party. I said to Loveleen I thought you only called us for the party. It seems many guests would be coming. I asked Loveleen why so big a party? She said it is in your honour. I am surprised and asked in my honour? She said you will see.

The party started and we sat in a corner with our glasses and looking at the party. Many guests were coming and congratulating Loveleen. I thought what happened, why they are congratulating Loveleen, for what?

At around 8 pm she called for attention. We all turned to Loveleen. She said I am glad you all could make time for this party. I am happy to announce that my father would be contesting elections as a CM candidate. All the honour goes to Mr. Kumar. Mr. Kumar, please come over here. His tireless crusade has brought

the results. For his contribution, I am offering him this car as a present from my father. She gave me the key to the car and shook my hand and thanked me. I was looking at her dumb folded. I said what is the need for the car, a bike would have been enough. She said don't worry about the bike, tomorrow you go and replace your scooter with a bike. I said thank you and came and stood with friends. I asked what happened? Kirit said she gave you a car as a gift and also offered you a bike too. I asked am I dreaming? Just pinch me.

Apparently, her father has become the most sought-after man in the party after getting the minister to resign. People were coming and shaking hands with me and asking for numbers or giving their numbers to call. It seems I have become the most sought after a man at this party.

Sahithi did not understand what happened and came and asked me what happened, why they are all coming to you? I said this is the payback for the mission Delhi. Still, she did not understand, I will speak to you later and went away.

I said to Kirit and Mahira let us go for a drive, showing the car key. Kirit said let us go. We made a round around Juhu beach and came back.

I asked Dimple is not seen around. Kirit said she must have tucked her away from the public glare. I went inside the house and looked in her bedroom. Dimple is sitting on a chair in front of the bed. I asked what are you doing here all alone? She said Loveleen told me she will call me when needed. I said ok and went and sat on the bed. I said Loveleen gave me a car as a gift. She said congrats. The total credit should go to you. I asked What she has promised you? She said We did not speak about that yet. I said ok, she must have planned something for you. I will see you and came back to the party. Loveleen came over and asked where you disappeared? I said we took a test drive in the car. She said oh, okay. After the party don't go away I have to speak to you. I said ok.

After the party, she sent Sahithi with her driver and Kirit and Mahira went on Kirit's bike. I stayed back as Loveleen asked me.

I sat on the sofa in the hall. She brought two glasses with liquor and gave me one. I sat there sipping the drink. Waiting for her to speak. She must be thinking something. I looked her over. She was wearing one of those high-class sarees. She had on a sleeveless blouse and wearing a necklace on her neck. She looked beautiful in the glaring light of the hall. I thought I could look at her forever. At last, she asked what happened? I am seeing how beautiful you are looking. She might not have heard what I said, she said my father informed me that Guru

was kidnapped by the ex-ministers goondas. They could not find him. I said why need him. She said for signing the divorce papers. I said don't worry if not today, tomorrow he will surface, then he had to sign them. It is not about that, I am thinking about how far they will go in this matter? You are not worried about them, no? I said why should I worry about them? She said someone in the party could have informed them that you are responsible for their plight. I said they will take a look at me and they would think he could not have done it, you could be diverting them from the real person. She said that is also there. I said if you are worried, then why did you announce my name at the party. It is not that, I just spoke to my father, he wants you at his side. He says you must be having some brains, to carry out the operation. I said I just got lucky. He wants you and Dimple to be at his side to help him in his candidature. I asked why Dimple? She said I don't know, what he has in his mind. Would you think of going? I said I don't know I have Sahithi and kids over here. My friends are here.

Loveleen said I can't send Sahithi to Delhi as she is needed here and I am planning to go myself there. She changed her position on the sofa. She is enticing to look at. My mind is not hearing what she is saying. My drunkard mind is only registering her beauty. Before today I never looked at her like that. My eyes are looking at her curves. The way she sat, the way she is holding the glass, the way she wore her hair, her makeup everything is making me hot inside. I got up saying I am going home. I took a step forward and I could not stand and sit down again. She made me stand and took me to her bedroom. I vaguely remember things that went on. I slipped into darkness.

I got up in the morning, I was sleeping in the room I slept in when I came back from Delhi. I tried to remember what happened last night, could not make head or tail of it. I got up went to the bathroom and came down to the hall. The servant brought me a cup of coffee. I drank it and asked for a refill. I picked a packet of fags and lit one and sat back. What did Loveleen say last night? She wants me to be in Delhi to help her father. But she won't let me take Sahithi with me there, as she is needed here, because She herself wants to go to Delhi. What is all this means? Sneha is no more and how can I live without Sahithi? As it is, our relationship is on a thin thread. I don't know when it will break off. A small incident could have a catastrophic effect on our relationship. What should I do? Seeing Loveleen coming, I snubbed the fag in the ashtray. She came over and sat down on the sofa. The servant brought two cups of coffee and gave each one. Sipping coffee, I looked over the rim of the cup. She is sipping her coffee looking somewhere else. What is she thinking? How to trap me into working for her? Or how to force me to go to Delhi. But her next words

surprised me. She said you don't have to go to Delhi. You continue your work here. I will ask father to consult you on phone. For the time being it is better that way. I thought why the sudden change of heart? She called the driver and told him to take me to my house and take Sahithi to the office. He said come to me and went away. I got up and said bye to her. She said I will speak to you later. I went and sat in the car. It is the car Loveleen gave me. He said After dropping Sahithi madam I will bring it back and leave it at your house. I said ok.

I went inside and sent Sahithi to her office and went for a bath and dressed and asked Chitti to get me something to eat. She already made lunch and served me lunch. I had my lunch and went to the factory. I told Kirit what I and Loveleen discussed in the night and again in the morning. I said one time she is saying her father asked me to come to Delhi, in the morning she is telling me not to go to Delhi. Now, what should I do? He said wait and see what she finally comes up with. I think you should stay here only. What you will do going to Delhi? I said that is also there. He said forget about these politics, we are not built for these politics. We got success in one operation, if we fail, on the next they will throw you out. It is not our cup of tea. I said I will tell Loveleen this Delhi business is not for me.

The phone rang and I lifted the receiver. It is Sunitha on the other side. She has called to inform me that she will be back in Bombay by tonight. I have not seen her for the last 20 days. This time her tour lasted long. I said I will try to be there. With so much happening around us, it is very difficult to give time.

The phone rang again it is now Loveleen. I said yes, she said you wanted a bike, go and exchange it at Honda showroom, I already talked to them. I told Kirit Loveleen ordered me a bike are you coming with me? We both went on my scooter to the showroom and selected the latest model of bike. We left my scooter there and returned back.

I was looking through the outstandings, as I was behind in my work and Kirit is picking up my work. The phone rang, this time it is my father. I said tell me daddy, everything alright at home. He said everything is fine, why don't you bring the kids and come home. I said I am a little busy nowadays, I will certainly bring kids one of these days. He said the reason I am calling is you know Mr. Pawar, colony president. I said I know him he has helped in some matters with Maharashtra Sena. He called me and told me to call you to come and meet Santacruz Sena Pramukh. They wanted to speak something with you. I asked what work do they have with me? He said it has to do something with the Minister's resignation. I said ok, I will come tomorrow. I said did you know I got

a car as a gift. He asked who has given it to you? I said you know Loveleen, where we had our kid's birthday party, she has given me. I will go to Vakola tomorrow. And cut the call.

I called Sahithi and said I am going to Vakola tomorrow, will you come there with the kids so you can visit your parents. She said I will come. Now I have to see what to do about Sunitha. What time will she reach home? If I miss her I don't know when I will get to meet her. I have to plan something about her.

I thought why I am getting suddenly so busy, one small operation has changed my life. Today Maharashtra Sena tomorrow, who? They must be calling just to give a warning not to do to same with them. Now it is after 4 pm.

I could not concentrate on the work. Put the files aside and looked at Kirit. He lifted his head and asked what? I said my mind is not working we will go have a fag and come. He said I am also coming. I took the bike keys and we came down. We normally don't have our fag near the factory. We go a little further on the road and get our fags. We drove and stopped at a paan shop and got 2 cigarettes and lit it. I said to Kirit I got a call from Santacruz Maharashtra Sena to come and meet them. How do they know you? We have gone to them for some work some time back through Mr. Pawar, who is the president of the colony and my father was secretary. So, they called me through Mr. Pawar. He said what they want? I said I don't know they may warn that I should not try with them. He said ok, go and see what they want, you will not lose anything.

I said I will leave for the home there are some other works to be completed and winked. He understood and said ok. Tomorrow will you be going to Vakola in the morning. I said I will meet them and come to the factory. He said ok, do that.

I dropped him at the factory and went home. I Rang Loveleen and said I am now at home send Sahithi a little early. She said I will send her now. I switched on the tv and started watching the news. There are some hot things going on in Haryana Politics. Then I saw Loveleen's father announcing his party in the opposition now will come back to the power in next elections and he will be nominating himself as CM. the newsreader said that the next elections will be coming up in the next three months and we have to wait and see how everything goes. I thought if all goes well Loveleen would be one of the powerful peoples daughter.

I called Loveleen and said congrats I said heard the news about the elections. She said I should congratulate you, you have a major hand in that. Did Sahithi

reach there? I said not yet. She said to ask her to call me once she reaches. I said I will do that and cut the call.

I went and had a bath and came and dressed. In the meanwhile, Sahithi reached home and she is making tea. I said Loveleen asked you to call her once you reach home. She said she will call now. She went and called Loveleen. I looked at the tea boiling removed from the stove and put it in cups and brought it out. I gave Sahithi one and took mine and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv. Some program is going on. I looked at Sahithi, she is still talking on the phone. I thought what is she talking about for so long? She cradled the receiver and came to me and said Loveleen is calling me to her house, must be something urgent. I said then you can go, I have some other works to complete. You go and come. She said the driver is waiting down I am going and she went away. Chitti brought the kids from School. I played with them for some time and took the car went over to Sunitha's place. Seeing the car watchman asked sir, new car? I said yes, I have to make a lot of trips out of the city, so brought the car. He asked where are the sweets? I gave him Rs.100 note and said go and purchase yourself. I opened the door and entered the flat. It seems she has not returned yet. I changed the dress and slept on the bed.

I don't know how long I slept, Sunitha woke me up. I sat on the bed and asked what time is it? She said 11:30. She asked how long were you sleeping I said something like five hours. She asked How come you came early? I said I am missing you, so I came early thinking you would be here, I have not found you so I laid on the bed and I don't know when I slept. She asked did you have dinner? I said no I was sleeping from 6. She said I will prepare something, wait. She went brought something to eat, we ate together and she asked what were you doing all these days? I asked did you see the news about the Haryana minister resignation? She said I heard someone talking on the plane, what happened? I said I am responsible for that. She asked how are you responsible for that? I said we have done a sting operation and he was caught in between. She said we will talk about that later, come to bed I have been waiting for a fortnight for this night. I asked then what are you waiting for? I am born ready and pulled her to me.

I woke up with an urgency in my mind. I got up and looked beside me Sunitha is sleeping peacefully. I remembered the last night. It was one of the best nights we had. She was so wild, I feared neighbours might have heard her. I woke her up and she opened her eyes, please let me sleep for some time. I said you can sleep later, I have to show you something. I have a lot of work today. She got up and came with me. I took her to my new car. She asked whose car is it? I said

ours only. When did you get it? I said yesterday, Loveleen presented me with this. She asked is it Loveleen's gift? I said yes, I told you about the sting operation last night, this is the gift for that. She said it is nice, but when will I get time to sit with you. I said we will make some time. First, get me some coffee I have got to go now. She asked you have to go now? I said I will come later, up to what time you will be here. She said I have up to tomorrow morning. I said I will come back in the night.

I called up Sahithi and told her I am coming home are you ready? She said we are getting ready. I said ok, I will be there in half an hour. She asked where are you going with Sahithi? I said I am taking them to Vakola, I have to meet Maharashtra Shakha Pramukh. She asked why? I don't know, they called me, so I am taking her for support there, she can speak in Marathi. They will feel we are one of them. She said a good idea. I said to remove a dress for me, I want to change and went to the bathroom for a bath. I came out and she put the dress on the bed. I wore the dress and said I will be back in the night, possibly we will have dinner together. She said I will be waiting for you.

I took the car and went home. By the time I reached home, they were ready. I took all of them in the car. First, we went to Shakha Pramukh's office. I got down took Atul in my hand and Sahithi took Reena and we went inside. The Shakha Pramukh is sitting on a chair, seeing us he got up and shook my hands. Sahithi told him in Marathi how are you doing. He told he is doing good. I showed the kids and said our twins. He looked at the two of us and thought they must have taken after father. I asked tell me why you called me? He said we have a problem you can only solve. I said tell me if it is in my power I will try to solve it. He asked are you going somewhere? I said to my in-laws to leave them there. He said then leave them and come back. I said ok and got up. I just want to show off Sahithi and the kids. I got out and went to my in-law's place. It is only a short distance around half a kilometre. I dropped them came back to the Shakha. Seeing me coming, he asked new car? I said I got it yesterday only. He must have understood where I got it from. After sitting down, he asked how did you pull that sting operation against the minister? I said we have not targeted him, he was just caught in between, Guru was the target. We have been following Guru for some time, we want to find out what he was doing. We thought he was supplying girls, but we found otherwise. He asked are you working for some news outlet? I said nothing like that it was some personal favour. He said why I called you is that we believe someone from the ruling party is targeting our leader. They want to malign his name and we want to stop such an act. I asked you don't want the other way, no? He said we don't have

any intention of doing that to them, we only want to save our leader. I said see, I am not a politician, not a political person. I don't know much about politics. The thing about that minister is I have done as a favour to my friend, who was involved in it somehow, I don't have full details. If you want to know how they can target your leader I can give you some ideas, which may or may not work out. I have to study how he is working who are there around him, things like that. It is a painstaking process of including and excluding. We have to eliminate one clue after another. It may take some time. He said I am glad I spoke to you, at least you gave us some idea of how to move forward. We will start gathering information and will call you when we have something in concrete, give me your number. I gave him my card which has both factory and house numbers. He looked at it said you have a phone at home too. I said you know my father is in the department, he got it for us. He said your wife is Maharashtrian, how did you marry her? Is it a love marriage? I told him in short, I know her for some time, when she sprained her ankle in the colony I took her to her uncle's quarters in the colony. Then when I was down and was almost behaving like a mad person due to some personal problems, she took me to her house and made a man out of me. We later married. So, she helped you when you were down? I said yes, he said very nice woman. I know their family, they live down the road. There were some rumours about her going away from her house and marrying outside their caste or something like that. I said she did not go away from her house, she got a flat given by her grandmother and she started living there and then gave me a room. We almost lived there together before we were married. He asked were you living under one roof. I said it is not like that she was taking care of me and I did not touch her until marriage. He said ok, I will let you know when we find something. I will put our men to work. I said see you then came out and took the car went back to the in-law's house. Took them and dropped Sahithi at her office first, then dropped the kids and Chitti at the house and went to the factory. I told Kirit in detail what went on at Maharashtra Shakha. I discussed emergency works with him and he said he will look after them. I took the car and reached Sunitha's flat. I went in and woke her and said let us go and have lunch somewhere. She said the first time you are taking me to lunch. Then be ready and come, I said. She went and had a bath, dressed and came, I was watching tv until she came. I switched off the tv and took her to the best restaurant closest to us. Seeing us getting down from the car, we got better service. We ordered and chatted until the order arrived. The food is tasty and she liked our first outing. I asked her what if I had to go to Delhi? She said no problem, you will have a flat there, then I come over there instead of Bombay. I asked will it be okay? She replied yes, it won't be a problem. When are you

going? I said it is not fixed, I was thinking about you when the offer came. Now I can accept the offer, only problem can be Sahithi can't come there. She said it's ok. She asked are you accepting the offer? What is the offer? I said I don't know what is it, some kind of advisor I think. Nothing is finalized yet, I wanted to know you are okay with it. Now I won't have any problem, I can think about it. I will let you know before taking the offer. When the bill came we both had an argument about who should pay it. I said I called you for lunch, I should pay for it. She said she should pay for it. Finally, we agreed to split the bill. I said this is the first time and we are going Dutch. I said Dutch, you pay your bill, I pay my bill.

We came back to the flat, I dropped her and came back to the factory. Kirit asked where did you disappear, I said I took Sunitha for lunch. He asked what is the occasion. I said this is the first time I took her out. Normally we only meet at night. Today she had a day free. I don't know when I will see her again, now she is on international trips.

I asked Kirit how are you managing the work? The season is a little dull, we can give Sunday off to the workers. There were no big orders for the last two weeks.

The telephone rang and I took the call and noted down the order. You just told me we don't have any orders see this, we will have full work for two weeks. Don't jinx with your words. I thought we can really have free time on this Sunday. He smiled and said you take the day off if you want, I don't have a problem with working. I asked where is Mahira? She is out of the city, I think she went to Hyderabad. I asked surprisingly Hyderabad? Who she has there? She must be having some relatives in the old city, that is what she told me. She was telling me how strict they are there. You have to have a burka if you are out of the house. Here I never saw her in a burka, I am getting a laugh thinking how she would look in a burka. I said we stayed in the old city before coming here.

The phone rang I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Chitti on the other side, what happened I asked. She said there is a Suresh from Sneha Bhabhi's village, he wants to speak to you. I said give him the phone. She said I will call him, he standing outside the door. He came in said hello. I asked him what happened? He said we found out how Sneha Akka died, you come home I will explain everything. I said I am coming, give the phone to Chitti. I said to Chitti seat him and give him something to eat and drink. I am just leaving here. I said to Kirit it is something to do with Sneha, let us go. I called Sunitha and said to her I am coming to pick you up lock the door and come outside. We went to Sunitha's flat picked her and went to our house. I opened the door and we went inside. Seeing me Suresh got up and said Baava, we found out how Sneha died. I asked

him that is what you told me on phone, really what happened. He said I have to tell you from the time I dropped her with children. I went back and informed her parents and then went to the village. Hearing, she was back with her husband they were happy, at least let her live her life, that's what they told me. Now in the city, there is a businessman who purchases rice from us and sells it here in Bombay. from Bombay he purchases cloth items and sells them in the city. Once when they came to know he is visiting Bombay, they asked him to keep an eye on Sneha. He came here, met her and told them she was happy in Bombay with her husband and children. From then on whenever he came here with rice after purchasing the clothes whatever leftover cash he has he is used to giving to her and used to collect from them. This went on for some time. Then when Sneha's maternal grandmother was on death bed, she insisted to sell her land and giving part of the payment to Sneha for her children. So, after selling the land, they gave him five lakhs to give to Sneha. When he came here to give the cash, he was told she was at the hotel. He went over to the hotel and took a room for himself. He met her and asked for some dinner. The cook and servers have already retired to sleep. So, she took it upon herself to give him food. Now what happened there I will tell you later. He went back to the village and informed them that he had passed on the cash to Sneha and said he is stopping the rice business as he is getting losses. Now when this madam, showing Sunitha, came to the city and informed me that Sneha died in a fire accident, I went and informed our grandfather. He did not understand how that could have happened. The dates seem to match the time they sent her money. So, they send people to search for the businessman. He left the city and went over to his village. After a long time, recently they found the businessman. When they threatened him with death, he came out with the story of how Sneha died. Sneha went to the kitchen to serve him dinner. She accidentally caught the fire as she was heating the vegetables. Instead of trying to save her, he left her there, went to his room took his bag the money he was supposed to give Sneha and took a bus and reached the city. That is what he is saying, it was accidental, but he did not try to save her. What I feel could be intentional, he might have tried it for the money. What really happened only God knows. Our grandfather made him pay the five lakhs and send it with me to give to you for the children. He specifically said to use it for children only. I said whatever your grandfather sent her, she deposited in a bank account, I transferred the money into the children's account, which they will get when they reach the age of 18. I thought that's what she would want. He said I will inform grandfather of this and went away after giving the cash. I took the money put it in the cupboard.

I said to Kirit and Sunitha the mystery is solved. And said to Sunitha it is your initiative that solved the case for us. It is you who informed them about Sneha's death, which they followed up. Thanks. She said what is the need for thanks between us.

I went inside and brought a bottle of whiskey, let us drink in the memory of Sneha.

I called up Sunitha and told her about Sneha's accident mystery. She said I am happy that everything came out and I am not responsible for her death. I was feeling guilty all this time. Now I have done correctly to give him her address. It is his bad decision to take the money and run away. Why did he not run away with the money? I said that we will never know.

I said to Kirit come, I will drop Sunitha and we will go to the factory.

We reached the factory and started working on the order received. I looked at the time it is nearing 7 pm. I said to Kirit I will see Sunitha, then will go home. He said how many times today. I said tomorrow she will start her duty and I don't know when I will see her again. He said go and don't forget to get to home. I said I will not forget. Did Mahira call you? He replied yes, she is busy with some marriage function. I said they might as well look for a groom there. He said that is what I am worried about. Why don't you get married? He said my parents are looking, but they there is some problem in my kundali. They say some dosha is preventing from getting brides. Don't worry you will find someone. There is a saying someone was made for each person. He asked if so, how many are made for you? I said so many as to fill my heart.

I took the keys and took the car and reached Sunitha's flat. The watchman saw me and said you are making a lot of rounds today. I said that is the advantage of having a car. Opened the door and went inside. Sunitha has come out of the kitchen. I asked what are you making for dinner. She replied nothing, just washing utensils. I said then let us go for dinner. She said I am coming.

We went to another restaurant for our dinner. I looked at Sunitha, she is looking as beautiful as I first saw her. I smiled at her. She asked what? I am thinking about the day I first saw you. I never thought you would sit before me like this. She asked what did you think I will marry your brother and become your bhabhi? I said no, not that, I did not think you would become mine. She asked did I become yours. I said if not mine, who you could be? She said you seemed to be becoming very busy nowadays? I said I don't know I am not getting enough time in the factory, Kirit is left to look after all the work. She said didn't

you take over the work when he went to Nasik? You always took the hard work and gave him slack. Now it is his chance for him to pay back. I said it is not a problem. Mahira is in Hyderabad and he is worried she will come back married. She laughed and said married and come good joke. Why does he think she will marry someone there? She could not possibly live there.

The waiter came and took our order. I said I will miss you. When are you going? She said early in the morning. How long you will be out of the city? She said might be 15 to 20 days. I said they are making it difficult for us to meet, shifting you around. She said this pays better. I asked where you have been, telling me something about the cities you have flown to.

We finished our dinner and this time she let me pay the bill. After paying the bill I asked what happened in the afternoon, you were insisting on paying for lunch. She said it was our first time, so I insisted on paying for the memory sake. Now I will remember when we first went out and when I paid for the lunch. We went back to Sunitha's flat and had a quickie and left saying to her to go to sleep you need to wake up in the morning.

I went home and sat on the sofa. Chitti came and asked shall I serve dinner? I said I already had my dinner, you have it. Where is Sahithi? She replied she has not yet come. I called her office. There was no reply. I called Loveleen, she said she is sending her with the driver, she is on her way. I said ok, see you then. She said wait, I have to discuss something with you, can you come over. I asked now? She said yes. I said ok, shall I come with the driver or on my own? She said come on your own, don't wait for the driver. I thought must be something important and said to Chitti Sahithi is on her way, I am going out, tell her. I took the bike keys and went to the parking. Because of the car I had to adjust the bike parking. I had a small inconvenience removing the bike, I thought I had to adjust the parking of the bike. I started driving the bike, I saw car lights coming in front of me, as I could not see into the car I ignored and drove on. I reached Loveleen's house in half an hour in the evening traffic. I went inside the house. Some people were waiting in the hall. I looked at them and looked at Loveleen as who are these people. She said they are my father's principal advisors. They have come to meet you. I said how are you doing in Hindi. I asked them what can I do? We have come to see you only. I said why do you all have to come all this way, I could have come over there. One of them said we thought at present we don't want them to know about you in our camp. We want them to think of that as a one-time operation. I said it is a one-time operation. We can't try it again, they will be aware of the modus operandi. One of them said what? I said mode of operation. How we do things. We have to keep these things secret,

they should not be aware of how we are going to hit them. Each one we have to devise a plan, and it should be unique. One of them said yes, this is what we want to know. Can you give us some plans? I said that would be difficult. Without knowing the person, I can't plan an operation. You do one thing collect information on whom you want to target, then come to me, I will tell you how to target him or them. Another person said excellent, we will do that. We will take leave now. See you in the future. And they went away. I said to Loveleen what is all this. She said they insisted on meeting you. They seem to be impressed with your outlook. Come let us have dinner, you must be starving. I said I already had dinner with Sunitha. I took her out to dinner. Ok then come have a peg and go.

I picked a fag from the packet and lit it. Sat smoking and watching tv.

Sahithi

I think I saw Kumar near our house. He was going on a bike. This must be the bike he brought today. Where is he going at this hour? I opened the door and went inside. Chitti came and said Kumar anna just went out. He told me to tell you. I asked where did he go? Chitti said I don't know, he did not tell me, he spoke to your madam and asked about you before going out. I said ok, she must have called him, there were some guests who have come to her house. She must have called him to meet them. Nowadays his popularity is going up. Everyone is asking about him, calling him. In the morning Shakha Pramukh called him, Kumar must have got scared about him, that's why he took me along with him. When he came back after speaking with him, he did not tell me anything. What he must have spoken with him? What has he done in Delhi, he is getting so much attention. He said he going to help Loveleen with her husband matter. He said due to that a minister had to resign and the assembly polls were coming up. There was some talk of him being sent to Delhi and Loveleen said I can't go with him to Delhi. She said I had to look after the firm here. How can we stay apart? Now he informed me in the evening that the matter with Sneha has been resolved and I have no hand in her death. It was the person her grandparents send to give her money who was responsible for her death.

After a long time, I am feeling liberated from all this stress. Chitti came and called me for dinner. She put all the dishes on the table. I asked did Kumar had dinner? She said he said he already had dinner and come. Where did he have dinner, must be with someone. I called Chitti you also have dinner it is getting late, she came and started having dinner. I asked her did you see any change in Kumar? Chitti said I did not see any change in him, he only became very busy

nowadays. He came home twice today, no it is thrice. I said no problem. He brought the car, you saw in the morning and he brought a bike in replacement of the scooter. The scooter has become very old.

I asked how is the school? Chitti said this school is better than the previous one. We will know after some time, how they are studying.

I called Loveleen and asked is Kumar there? She said he is here, he came to meet the guests from Delhi. He will come back in sometime.

I went to sleep waiting for Kumar's return. I heard the doorbell and looked at the time. It is after 1 am. Who could be at this hour, Kumar would have opened the door and would have entered? I opened the door Loveleen's driver brought Kumar in an inebriated condition. I asked what happened? He said must have drunk too much. I thought he never drinks too much, one or two pegs are maximum. Then why like this, who could have forced him to drink? I helped the driver bring him in and put him to bed.

Kumar

I woke up with a start and sat on the bed. Sahithi must have felt that and asked what happened? I looked around seeing it is our house, I said how did I come home. She replied Loveleen's driver brought you here, what is the need to drink so much? I said I only drank one peg and I don't remember what happened next.

She got up from the bed and said you sleep it off, I will prepare breakfast and will wake you and she went away. I laid back on the bed, what happened last night. I remember having the drink brought by the servant and lighting a fag. Then? I vaguely remember Loveleen taking me to a bedroom and putting me to bed. Then Dimple came and rode me. Dimple stopped and got up and Loveleen collected my semen. Why did she collect my semen? What did she intend to do with it?

Sahithi came in and told me Loveleen will send a car, come with me and collect your bike. I said ok, I will do that.

So, what has happened last night? I hear Loveleen cursing where he is sleeping and coming here? She must be referring to my night with Sunitha, did she not get enough?

I got up and went to the bathroom brushed and came out. Sunitha brought a cup of coffee and placed it on the table. Are you feeling any hang up? I said no, I did not feel like I have drunk too much last night. What happened?

She said drink the coffee and have a bath, the driver would be coming. I said I'm going and finishing the coffee went to the bathroom.

I dressed up and came into the hall and sat at the dining table. Chitti brought breakfast and put it in front of me. I finished and got up collected my things from the pockets of yesterday clothes. The bike key is with the other things, I pocketed them and sat on the sofa. Chitti brought tea and put it on the table.

We went to Loveleen's house in her car, I got down and took my bike and went to the factory. Kirit has not yet come. I sat down on the seat and looked at today's manufacturing schedule given by the supervisor. I went to the supervisor to take up the paint company's order first as they are demanding immediate delivery. He said he will take it up first. I came back to the cabin and sat down on my chair. The telephone bell rang, I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Mahira on the other side. I asked what are you doing in Hyderabad? She said I came here on a marriage function. I asked is it not finished? She said the marriage is next week. I asked you will not be back in Bombay for another week? She said it will be more than one week. Where is Kirit? I said he has not yet come. He was remembering you yesterday. She asked what is he saying. He saying you should not marry and come. She laughed tell him I will not marry without telling him. I said I will tell him. So how is our Hyderabad? She asked ours? I said yes, you are there and I studied my degree there, so, it is ours. She said oh, that way. It is very hot here, the atmosphere is not like in Bombay. I was told rains also will not be like Bombay. But the main problem here is burkas. We can't put our foot outside without a burka. If someone comes to visit, if we have to go in front of them we have to have burka, so many restrictions here. So old fashioned people here. It is not like Bombay, our parents don't object to us wearing any kind of dresses. I and my sister wear frocks, jeans and tops and all the latest fashionable dresses. They never objected, here we had to go and get dresses to wear. I know how it is there, we used to live in old city. We used to live in a pahilwans house. They were different, his daughter used to come to our house, I never saw her wearing a burka. She said my bill is increasing tell Kirit I called. I said I will tell him and cut the call.

I called my father's office number and told him about our conversation with Shakha Pramukh. I also told the details of Sneha's accident and said someone let her die for money. Finally said nothing to worry about and cut the call.

Where is Kirit, why did he not come yet? I rang up his house, his mother said he had already left home for the factory. I looked in his father's cabin he is also not there. He must have gone to some customer, at least he should have informed me. He might have tried to inform me in the night, that is why I could not get his message. If he comes to the factory I want to go to Loveleen's house and find out what is her play, why she is doing all this.

Kirit

I am coming from Andheri via Powai to Bhandup. When I got down from Powai road and reached Kanjurmarg bus depot, there was some drama going on the road. Some people stopped a car on the road and were attacking with swords, then they took a briefcase from the back seat of the car and went to their cars. They were stout and were wearing suits. I thought nowadays goondas also wearing suits. Total traffic on the road stopped. I stopped my bike and stared at the going on. I was a little behind at first, I moved a little forward and came to the top of the traffic and stood there first to go. Then one of his men's eyes fell on me. He seemed to have recognized me. I never laid my eyes on him. He called another man said something. He took out a pistol from his pocket, came to me and sat behind me and said go behind the cars. I started driving behind those cars. Thinking why they need me.

Kumar

I waited for a long time and Kirit did not show up. I thought something might have happened to him and called his father and informed him about Kirit not showing up. He said he will look into the matter. I went to the nearest police station and enquired about any accidents involving bikes. They said there were no accidents reported and asked me what route he takes. I said he comes from Andheri via Powai. They said there was an incident of theft on that road. I asked them what happened there. They said some people in cars came and stopped a car and took the briefcase in the back of the car. I asked them could they have taken him with them? They don't have any idea and will check with eyewitnesses. I gave them my card and told them to inform me if they got any information and came back to the factory.

Now I don't know what to do. I rang Kirit's father and explained the situation. He said he will contact some known people about this and cut the call. My thought of going to Loveleen forgotten I sat there thinking of what could have happened with Kirit.

Kirit

I drove behind the cars with the man sitting behind me poking me with the gun in his hand. The cars stopped at an old bungalow parking lot. I stopped behind them and parked the bike. The man who sat behind me poked with the gun and said move. I went with the other men. The one who is holding the briefcase put it on a table at the centre of the room and stood back.

Opening a door Dolly entered the room and opened and looked at the briefcase. Satisfied it contains what she is expected to find, she closed the lid. Looking at me she asked where did you find this idiot? I did not feel about them bringing me, I felt bad she called me an idiot. One of the men said he was watching us looting the briefcase, we recognized him from the Nasik operation and brought him with us. She said you made a big mistake bringing him here, now he has seen our location of the operations, what should we do about him? One of the men said shall I leave him at his place? Dolly said he is not the idiot, you are worse idiots than him. what am I telling and what are you talking about? Another man asked then what should we do? First, tie him there, we will see what do to. One man took me to a chair and tied me to it. Dolly said we have got what we came to Bombay for, we should leave immediately. One man said what shall we do about him? Dolly said now, you have tied him, so leave him there. Dolly took the briefcase and they all left and I heard the cars pulling out. I looked around I could not find anything to untie myself. I tried to loosen up the knots and was unsuccessful in doing so. I got tired of trying all available methods left to god and started praying. I don't know how long I was praying, I slipped into sleep. I heard sounds and looked around it has become dark. Someone showed a torch and loosened my knots and freed me. I asked who is it. He put the torch to his face, it is Kumar. I asked how did you find me? He said through magic. I really believed him then. He laughed and said we had help from the police. One of the eyewitnesses said you were taken by them and he had followed you for some time and came and reported to the police. The driver of the car from which they have taken the briefcase is known to him and he took the initiative to follow them and find their hideout. By the time police had come they had already left and police are following up on the clues. I came when I got to know of the information to take you home. He put me in his car and took me to my house. On the way, he told me about the call from Mahira and about Loveleen and her drink. He said he would have gone to Loveleen demanding an explanation for her actions, but due to my disappearance, he was behind the police. He said he brought the car for the purpose of taking me home, thinking what position I would be in.

I asked him did they find what is in the briefcase. He said the driver of the car has no idea what is in the briefcase. He said his employer has given it to be taken to an address and they intercepted and took away the briefcase. Now he has to inform his employer, who is out of the city.

Whatever happened I escaped unscathed. I told Kumar Dolly called me an idiot. He said what, Idiot. You deserve the title, if you are not an idiot, why would you have loved her. I said it is not love, it is just attraction. He asked if it is an attraction with Dolly, what is with Mahira? I said maybe lust.

Kumar

I had a horrible day finding Kirit. I had to coordinate with the police in chasing many eyewitnesses. At last one person came to the police station to report that those goondas who had stolen the briefcase were at a bungalow. He had seen it with his own eyes and he came back to report it. I had gone behind the police to the place, it seems they have already left the place. It was dark and looked abandoned. Police went away to chase the clues, I took a torch and went looking in the building. I found him tied to a chair and untied him and brought him back. Now we know Dolly is around here somewhere. I have to get the full details of the conversation he had with them.

I left Kirit at his house and came back home. I looked at the time it is around 11 pm. The whole day has gone down the drain. The day is wasted chasing for Kirit. I went in sat on the sofa. Sahithi came and asked did you find Kirit. I said yes and safely at home. She asked did you had dinner? I said no please serve, I will wash my hands and come. I went in changed and went to the bathroom washed my face, hands and legs came and sat at the table. After finishing dinner washed my hands and came and sat on the sofa switched on the tv.

After some time Sahithi came and told me to come and sleep. I got up and went to the bedroom lay on the bed.

Sahithi lay on the bed and turned towards me said after a long time my mind cleared and my heart is full of love for you. Come satisfy me.

It's during the act it struck me why Loveleen is doing that, she wanted to have my kids. But why to do like that with drinks and all, she could have at least asked me once if I had refused, she did that would have some meaning. With Sahithi my mind is wandering around. Satisfying herself she slept off. My mind is still on Loveleen's act I dozed off.

I got up with a jerk. Sahithi asked sleepily what happened? I said nothing and got up from bed. I went to the bathroom, brushed and went into the kitchen prepared a cup of coffee and came and sat down on the sofa. I sipped the coffee and thought why did I wake up with a jerk. What did I feel or is it something in my dream? I could not recollect. Sahithi got up and asked did you had your coffee? I said yes. She asked what happened you got up in a jerk? I said I don't know. She asked did you have a bad dream? I said I can't remember. She said it's ok and went into the kitchen.

I kept thinking about the jerk, is it because my sub-conscience is telling me something. Something happened or going to happen, is it a signal to be to beware of something? Or is it to do with Sneha's death? I have been raking my brains to try to understand What is it?

I got up and went to take bath. After finishing the bath, I came back dressed up and sat down at the dinner table. Chitti brought breakfast put it on the table.

I had breakfast, washed my hands and went and sat on the sofa. Chitti brought tea and I sipped it. Sahithi came into the hall dressed up, I asked her do you want me to drop you or will Loveleen will send the car. She said please drop me at the office. I said ok come fast and switched on the tv and started watching the news. Sahithi had breakfast and took her bag and came and said come, let us go. I took the car keys and took her to her office, dropped her and went to the factory. During the ride, I looked over the place where yesterday's drama happened. I stopped aside and went over to a paan shop at the side of the road. I took a pack of fags and started chatting with him. After a small talk, I asked did you see yesterday's attack with the swords? He said he had a clear view of the goings on. First, they stopped the car and pulled the driver out. Are there anyone in the car I asked? He said I could not see anyone else in the car. I asked then what happened? They threatened him with the swords and took out the briefcase from the backseat and handed it to someone sitting in their car. Then one person took out his gun and came over to the stopped traffic. He sat behind someone on a bike and they drove behind the cars. The person on the bike is he part of the gang I asked? He said it did not seem so the person who sat behind him threatened with the gun and then only he drove behind them. I asked did you recognize any one of the gang members? I did not recognize anyone but someone in our chawl says he recognized one of the members. He thought he was wearing a suit and all and thought when did he join a security agency or something like that. I said I also thought that why they were wearing suits, are they from some security agency? He said from what the man from our chawl said he could not be from any government agency. He did not even pass 10th. I

asked then they should be from some gang? He replied it seems so, he heard he joined some gang and he was sending good money home, but he used to come home once in a while only. His wife was always complaining about him not coming home regularly. I asked does he writes to her regularly? He said what letters, he never wrote to her, only on money order he used to send messages. I thought if he is sending money orders then there could be a clue to that. I asked him can I meet the man from your chawl, at least give me a name. He said his name is Prakash Jadhav. We stay at that chawl you can see from here. I said yes, thanks and got in the car and drove to the police station where I lodged a complaint. I went to the SI I have interacted with and told him the interaction I had with panwala. If you go to the chawl and find Prakash Jadhav you can get more information about the gang. If you solve this you can catch a national level gang, for your information it is been run by Dolly and they have cheated many banks with loan scams. We had some interaction with them previously and Kirit had just escaped by nick of time. If you want you can contact the Nasik police they will have all the information about this gang. He said he will look into the matter and I came out took my car and reached the factory. I told Kirit I got clues about the Dolly and her gang, I just passed it to the police and coming. He said can they catch her, I said if they follow the lead I gave them they should be able to track them. I hope to god they will find her and her gang.

I thought about Loveleen and decided not to approach her until she calls me. In the present situation, I think it is best to avoid her and look after my work.

I started with outstanding and calling customers for payments. There were some complaints from the customers, I have handled them with ease and they promised to release the payments. I said to Kirit get me a computer this work can be streamlined. He said you don't know anything about computers, how do you know you can streamline the work. I said I don't know but I am confident of doing it. I think this thing can be reduced by at least fifty per cent. He said we will try with a second hand one. I said do that.

I finished the outstanding's and looked at the accounts, few entries were pending completing them and put the accounts aside. I thought what are the pending works. Went over to the floor supervisor and asked him how the works are going on. He said everything is working fine. The machinery is not giving any problems. Pending orders are coming down, deliveries are going out on time. He said after you started looking after the factory everything is going fine and workers are happy. I said thanks and went back to my cabin.

I thought the factory is running smoothly, I should find something else to do. I am getting restless with this kind of work. It is not my destination. This factory this work is not my cup of tea. I am not born to do this kind of work. I have to find my line of work, where I will excel. I know politics is also not my type, I won't fit in there. What I have done for Loveleen is one time and I have done it to help Loveleen come out of Guru's shadow. And the circumstances have helped me achieve it. The minister is just a means to the end. I have to find my niche. I thought about the server room in the Paint company. I should be sitting there with computers around me. Something is running in my mind. I took a pen and wrote it on paper. Whatever I wrote, I could not understand it. It is written in the English language. But they are not words and sentences which we normally speak. I could recognize words like if, case, else, etc. what is this language? I have to find out. I showed it to Kirit, do you understand what is written here? He said no, I have not seen something like this before.

I said to Kirit let us go out for a fag. He got up, we went down. I asked where is your bike? He said I have given it for service. I said then let us go in my car. I took out the car drove to our regular spot. He brought us fags. We sat in our car opening the door with our legs hanging outside. I took the paper from the dashboard and wondered what it meant. There is a little breeze and the paper flew out of my hand. I got down from the car went behind it. One man was coming, seeing me running behind the paper he caught it and looked at it. He asked is it your paper. I said yes. He looked at the written matter once more and asked did you write this? I said yes. He asked so are you a software programmer? I asked what is it? He asked without knowing software you wrote this? I said I don't know what is software. He asked then how did you write this? I said something furrowing in my head so, I put them on the paper. He said you seem to be a natural programmer. Can you work with me? I said I already has a job working as Manager with his factory showing Kirit. He went over to him and said hi, I am Kathuria, I supply software to companies. I have seen what he had written. He can become a great programmer. Kirit how do they do programs? He said on computers. Kirit said that is why he is asking me to get a computer for a long time. He said he seems to be natural. I have never seen one like that before. Send him to me for part-time. I will teach him programming. Kirit asked where is your office. He said Kalina. Kirit said he used to live in Vakola, now he stays in Vikhroli. Isn't it a little far from here. He doesn't have a transportation problem, he has a car and bike. He said I move all over Bombay to supply software. I will do one thing whenever I am here I will come and meet you guys. Where is your office? I took out a card and gave it to him. There are our factory number and my house number of this and address. You can come anytime.

I have not thought much about him, he must be pulling my leg.

We have received on Saturday an invitation to a party at Loveleen's. We are about to leave for the party, the telephone rang. I lifted the receiver and it is Kathuria on the other side. I asked him what does he want? He said he wants to meet me. I said I am going to Juhu Koliwada for a party if he wants, he can come over there, it is not much far for him. He said it is okay for him and took Loveleen's address. I have not thought much about him. We went over to the party, Loveleen is asking about Mahira, have not seen her for some time. I said she went over to Hyderabad for a marriage function and winked at her. Understanding it she said now she will return married and Kirit face became red. I slapped him on the back and said she will not return married, don't worry. The servant came and told someone is looking for Kumar he said his name is Kathuria. I said I am coming and we all went to meet him. I introduced Loveleen as the host of the party and asked him what can I do to help him. He said I am getting a problem with the program, it is not working as it expects to do. All our programmers are perplexed by the bug. I asked is there an insect in your computers? He said it is not an insect it is an error, please look into this and opened a laptop and showed me something written. It is the first time for me to look at the computer screen. It looked like a tv screen attached to a typing board where abcd is written. I know some typewriting and the abcd are arranged in the same order as a typewriter. He put the laptop on a table, I pulled a chair near to it and sat down and looked at the written matter. It seemed gibberish to me. I looked at it and asked him how to go up and down. He showed me keys to move up and down and sideways. I started to move downwards looking at the written matter. Somewhere in the middle, it struck me and I typed end if. I asked him to check it now.

He ran the program and checked satisfied he closed the program and ran it again completely satisfied he said marvellous, none of our programmers can catch it, how did you do it. I said don't know, I felt like those words were needed there and I put them there. He turned to Loveleen you have a great natural programmer here. Thanks for your help, sorry to gatecrash your party. She said no problem, stay for the party. Everyone is welcome here. We are waiting for an announcement on tv. She took a remote and switched on the tv. The news started, the newsreader started with we have breaking news as the Haryana government dissolved the assembly and announced elections. She called for Campaign and said party time. Kathuria asked what this party has to do with assembly elections? She said thanks to Kumar that is possible. He seemed confused and asked what did he do. She said he made the elections possible and

he will make sure we will win the elections. She said to me be ready to fly to Delhi tomorrow. It is now the turn of Kathuria to beg, he said I wanted his help with my program, I know he is a natural. She showed him the car standing in the parking lot and said to him it is a gift from me to him for making this possible as if to challenge him what you can do for him. He looked at the car and turned to go packing his laptop. She said to enjoy the party and go. Everyone is welcome here. He stopped taking a glass drank and left. I turned and asked Loveleen how do you know they will dissolve the assembly? From sources she said. we got information that this is going to happen, they want to reduce the hammering by opposition parties went to elections early, now they dug their own grave. I will just come. She went over to the phone called and spoke for some time and came back. She said I just spoke to my father he is happy they are ready to face the electorate. He tole me not to send you there now, he does not want them to know about you, let them wonder who are you. He said he will speak to you through me. So even if they track phone calls they can't know it was you. I said whatever.

I had a peg and went back home. I did not wait there longer as I feared she may do something like last time.

Loveleen called me around 11 pm. I asked what happened? She said Kathuria came back again after you left. He used the Punjabi card with me and asked me to get you to help him. I asked what help he heeded from me? I hardly know anything about what he does. It was just a fluke I found the error on this program. She said you seemed to have a magic touch according to him. If you help or not is your decision, I can't come in between in those matters. But remember that you are needed with us in our work. We are dependent on you to help us with our plans. I said I will keep that in mind. Did he give any of his details, like phone number or address? She said he gave me both, note down and told me the address and phone no.

The next day I called Kathuria on the number Loveleen gave me and he told me he is about to receive a big order from a new customer. If I could help him debug the application, he could get the order and he will pay me handsomely for my efforts. I said payment is not a problem, only time, as I have lots of works going on. He asked what do you do? I said I have to look after the factory, that is my number one priority. Second, I had to help Loveleen with her father's election work. Sena Pramukh has also asked for my help in a little matter. These are my works at present and I don't know what else might come in like your offer. He said I will ease your work a little, you get a computer and I will install one of my software which will reduce your burden a little. Such free time you

can use to help in my work. I said ok if you are saying so. He said you get yourself a computer and printer and call me then I will come and install the software and train you. If you don't know how to get a computer I will arrange for it. I said we can get a computer. I will let you know when we get one. I cut the call.

I called Kirit and told him about the offer by Kathuria. He said we will get a computer and a printer and see what he is offering.

I called Sahithi are you coming? She said coming and came with her bag. I took the car keys and dropped her at her office. Then went over to one of our customers who also has a computers business. I told him I wanted a computer and printer. He asked what is the configuration required. I called Kathuria from there asked him about the configuration. He asked me, where are you? I said with a computer dealer. He told me to give the phone to him and explained to him the configuration and the requirements. He noted them and gave me a price. I said to him to send them to our factory and we will adjust the amount against our outstandings. He said he will send the computer or you can collect it now, seeing me coming in a car. He asked how did you get the car? How much did you pay for it? I said I got it as a gift from a friend. He asked was it from a girlfriend? I said nothing like it, but yes. I got it for helping her with a problem. Then if you have them ready I can collect them. He called some one on the phone and he said they will be here in 5 minutes. He asked so what are you going to do with a computer? I said the one I called for configuration said he will install an application that we can use it for our factory work. He asked how much are you paying for the application. He is installing it to get me some free time which he wants to use for himself. He said what a joke. I said it is not a joke when he asked my help with his work, I said I have a lot of goings on my work and I can't spare him any time, he said I will give an application to reduce your workload which time you can spare for me. He asked me I know you are working as a manager with the factory. What it is to do with software. I don't know about it, he was behind me to help him out. He looked at me strangely. He said whatever, here your computers have come, told the man who brought them to put them in my car. I gave him the keys to put them in the car. He handed me a bill and said put it in our account. I said thanks and went out took the keys and back to the factory. I called a worker and told him to take the computers and put them in my room. I have removed all the things from the packing and placed them on my table. I asked the workers to get me another table. They brought the table and placed it where a power source is available. I told him to place them on the table. I adjusted them and now we don't have power points for all

these things. I called a worker and told him to get us a power strip. He took around half an hour and brought a power strip. I called our supplier who has given us the computer and told him to send me a UPS.

I connected them and switched on the computer. Now it is saying no OS available. I called Kathuria and told him we got the computer and printer now what should we do. He said he will send someone.

Kirit came over, saw that I have arranged the computer and asked what are you going to do with that? I said I am waiting for someone to install the software so that we can use it.

I said let us do our work we see about this computer later. I started looking at the pending orders and sorting them out what is to be completed first and what can be taken later. I prepared the urgent works and went and gave them to the shift supervisor. I came back to the cabin, finding the man Kathuria sent over. He is looking over the system. He took over some floppies from his bag and he is installing them. It took around 2 hours for him to complete the installation. When the system is up and running he put another set of floppies and installed some software. After completing, he checked what he installed and said to me come I will show how this system can be used. He asked me what kind of work you do. I showed him our orders, accounts, etc. He took some customers orders and first he fed the customers data. Then he fed some other masters and showed me how to feed them. He showed me how to enter the data and fed them himself. After feeding different kinds of data he was making me also enter the data myself. I started following his data entry and tried to understand the workflow. Finally, his work came to some point and he said he will come tomorrow to show me more work. For the time being, I should feed the data entry he showed me. I said I will do that and he went away. Kirit asked me did you follow what he is explaining. I said it is not much difficult to follow when you know what are you doing. I understand our work, how is it difficult to what we are feeding. Kirit said you have a point there. Now, what happens to whatever feeding. I said we should get some output. It depends on what we feed. How we take our outstandings, we add our billing and we subtract what we receive, that is our outstanding. So, to get our output we have to have all the data. Kirit said then we have to feed all the data to know what output we will get. I said exactly until we feed all the data we can't get an output. He said I am getting a picture now. I said come feed some data I will show you. You should also learn. We sat and fed the data until six pm. I said it is enough for today. Check the work on the shop floor then we can go.

When Kirit came back I said let us go and I came out took my car went home.

I went and sat down on the sofa. Chitti came with water and asked will you have tea. I said bring it. I went into the bedroom, Sahithi is sleeping, I changed and went to the kid's room. They are sleeping peacefully. It is very hot in the room. I thought we should have an air conditioner for them. I asked Chitti is this hot daily. She said no today it is a little hotter, maybe it will rain. I said it is not like Andhra to rain after a hot day. The sea air only make it cooler, if there is no air movement in the morning that day will be hotter. When it will start raining it will go on raining. It is very difficult to go out during the rainy season. I used to watch the satellite picture on the news to know the rainy conditions for tomorrow. She asked how would you know from that? I said if the clouds were thick in the picture it will certainly rain otherwise we can assume it will not rain heavily. She asked so when it will start raining? I said to know that we have to watch the news they will tell about the monsoon movement. I think in another fortnight rains may start. We are lucky we have a car now, it will make it easy to do our works. Maybe listening to our sounds Atul opened his eyes and said daddy. I took him in my hands and kissed him and put him down and said go and play. I looked at Reena she is still sleeping.

I went and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv.

After some time Sahithi came out of the bedroom yawning she asked when did you come? I said some time back. She shouted Chitti get me tea. I asked why are you shouting? She said I wanted tea. I said come sit, she will bring tea. She came and sat down. I asked her are you having problems at work? She said nothing like that. I asked her shall we go out for dinner? She asked what is the occasion? I asked do we need an occasion for going out for dinner? She said we don't need one, let us go. I said go and get ready. Chitti brought tea and she started sipping it. After finishing tea, she went to the bathroom. After having a bath, she readied and came out. She asked me why are you not ready? I said I was waiting for you to come out I am going now. I went had a bath dressed and came out.

I picked up the car keys and said let us go. She asked are we going by car? I said yes, any problem? She said no problem let us go. We went to a restaurant.

We ordered and sat chatting. When our order is served we ate it. After finishing dinner, we came out and sat in the car. I said shall we go somewhere. She asked where can we go? Shall we go to the beach and sit for some time there. She said let us go. We went to the beach sat on the beach for some time. She asked for Ice cream. I got her ice cream and finished that we got back to the car. I asked her how are you feeling about being driven in our car. She said great, we have

everything in our life, what else can I ask for. I asked how is your job. Better than the typing job. Now I am the boss. Earlier I had to work under someone. Loveleen has given me some clients, she handles some clients. She let me handle them as I like. She would not interfere with my work. I am feeling like a boss myself. I said it feels you have settled yourself in your career. Now I may have to make some hard decisions about my career. I feel like I am stifling in my factory job. Sometimes I feel like what I am doing here. There are no timings and late-night problems at work, I feel like I am a fool working in this job. Sahithi asked what you want to do? I said that's what I could not understand, I feel I am destined for greater things. I thought about my political career, still, I feel I do not belong there. Two days back I had a kind of revelation I put them on paper and was thinking about what I have written. Then one person saw that and told me it is a software program written on computers and was behind me to help me with his work. She said how can you help him? He wants me to do what is the word debug the program, which means finding errors in the program. He is expecting a big order and wants that order under any circumstances. He is behind me to help him. We got a computer and he sends his man to install and train us in the use of the computers. I feel computers are my future. Sahithi said go and do your thing. Don't feel pulled back by anything. You have some savings and I also have some savings and we got a good amount when the hotel closed, I put them in a fixed deposit. Moneywise we are in a good position. I know Kirit will not let you go. You start your computer thing in a small way and allot time according to the requirements. Then we will see how it goes on. You have other things going on, you just allow them some time as not to anger them. I know you can do anything when you put your mind to it. Just be careful and think of your children when you are making hard decisions. Think about how it will affect them. I am behind you, remember that.

I sat there thinking about what Sahithi told me just now. After thinking for a moment, I started the car and drove to our house.

We gave Chitti the food we brought for her and went and changed and came back to Hall and sat down and switched on the tv.

After the Haryana election notification, I was following the political news there. I wanted to find a way for the elections to be won by Loveleen's party. I know today or tomorrow they will come back to me to offer them some advice.

Sahithi came and sat beside me. I started discussing state politics with her. She would know state politics and may not know national politics. I want to get ideas from her on politics. She seemed to have a good knowledge of state

politics. I mentally noted down some points she mentioned as they might be useful when discussing their state. At last, the news is completed and another program started and she stopped the discussion and started watching the program seriously. I thought is this politics for me? I don't seem to have much interest in politics. Am I doing this for Loveleen? Or what she could be providing me with, like the car and bike. Do I have any expectations from her? I thought no, I don't have any expectations before and not in the future. I never thought she would gift me those vehicles. Then why would I have any future expectations? That means I am doing this just to please her. What will I get to please her? I am treating her as a friend and I am doing what I would do to help a friend in need. Pleased with my thought process, I switched my attention to the tv program. The phone rang and I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Mahira, she said when she called Kirit, he was not there at home. I said I don't know where he is. She said they came to the Charminar area for some shopping. She saw an STD booth and she called him, not finding him she called me. I said how the marriage preparations are going on. She said at a brisk pace. I asked when is the marriage. She said in two days. I asked when are you coming back? She said she did not know yet. I asked her did you get your leave? She said she informed them she was not feeling well when she comes back she will submit a doctors certificate. I said that is a good idea. She asked did you miss me? I said Kirit is missing you much. I not much because I have a full load of work. Now we got a computer at our factory. we are getting training on using that. She said tell Kirit I called you and cut the call. I thought where he could have gone at this hour. After the incident where he was taken at the gunpoint, I started to worry about his activities. I called our factory number, Kirit lifted the call. I said Mahira called you at home thinking you would be at home. What are you doing at the factory at this hour? He said I am getting myself familiar with the computer. Someone gave me a game floppy I am playing that and forgot about the time. I said don't play too much games and go home, you mom would be worrying about where have gone after Mahira called you there. Call home and then go home. He said ok, I am just leaving now, what did Mahira say? I said they went to Charminar for shopping, she called from there. She told me the marriage will be in two days and she did not know when she will back in Bombay. He said she was away for a long time. Ok, see you tomorrow. I asked him who did you get the game's floppy? He said my swadhyaya mate. I said switch off the computer and go home, and cut the call.

I came back and sat down beside Sahithi. She asked what happened? I said Kirit is sitting in the office playing games on the computer. Did he think I brought the computer to play games? Now he will ignore all the work and play games.

Chitti came over and said bhabhi I finished all the work in the kitchen going to sleep. She said ok, are the children are sleeping? She said they are already sleeping.

Sahithi said go and sleep and Chitti went away. She said shall we go to sleep, not finding anything good on tv, I said let us go. We went to bed.

Kirit

Prakash Gandhi has given me the game's floppy to check the game. He said he brought it at Grant Road. I took that and copied it to the computer. Then I started playing. It is called Prince of Persia. There are many levels to the game. With difficulty, I crossed level 1 and now Kumar is telling me to stop and go home. How can I leave the game and go home? If I don't go home he may come here to scold me. I better go and switched off the system went down to the work floor. The floor supervisor said you did not go home yet? What are you doing so late? Go home. I said I am going took out the bike and started to drive.

Kumar

The next day I dropped off Sahithi at her office and went to the factory. After some time, the man Kathuria sent came and put a floppy and copied something into the computer. He said let us continue our training. I said to him sorry I did not ask you earlier, what is your name? He said Rajesh. I said let us continue.

We worked on the system for two hours. He said it is enough for today. Kathuria was asking when will you come to our office? I said whenever he wants. Rajesh said let us go now. I asked him how did you come? He said by bus. I said ok, let us go by my bike. I got the bike today, you don't have a problem with it? He said he is fine with that. I said to Kirit I am going to see what he wants, don't play too much games. He said I don't have time for any games, so much work.

When we went down to the parking Rajesh asked why you were telling me about bringing a bike? I said I normally would bring the car, today I wanted to drop my wife early so took the bike. Nowadays I am preferring the car to bike. Let us go. When we reached Kalina he gave me directions to their office. We parked outside their office and he guided me to their office. It is a small office with a few developers working there. He took me to a room where Kathuria is sitting. He welcomed me and told me to sit down. I asked what can I do for you? He said look at this program and tell me what are the bugs in this program. He took me to a system and opened a program for me. I sat down in front of the system and started going through the program. First, I tried to understand what

is written. Then I asked him can I run it see. He showed me how to run the program and how to use the program and explained what each screen does. After looking at what is the functions of the program again I went to the program. Going from line to line reading what is written there. Where ever I felt there is needed changes I made. I worked on the program perhaps for two hours. I again went through the program again not finding anything to change, I told him I think all the required changes are made and he could check everything. I said I think my work is finished here I am going back to the factory, if you need anything you can call me and came out of the room. I told Rajesh I am going back to the factory. I took the bike and returned to the factory.

After returning to the factory I started working on the data entry of the accounts. By the evening I finished the data entry and looked at the reports produced by the application. We could get customer wise outstandings and vendor wise pending payments. We could take out the reports of the orders pending. I thought our data entry is successful and called Kirit and showed him all the reports available to us. I told him now we can cut down our work by 75 per cent. Kirit said is it possible to cut the work by that much? I said just see everything is at our fingertips. We might have to feed the data for half an hour and we could get everything from orders to outstandings and payments.

He said whatever you are saying is correct. I think we can reduce our workload. Now what he asked I have done, let us see what else he asks.

The telephone rang I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Sunitha she said she is calling from Delhi and she is coming to Bombay and there will be laying off about 6 hours, she is asked me to come and meet her. I asked what time the flight lands. She said around 5:30. I looked at the watch it is 4:15. I said I will come and meet her at the airport. She said ok and cut the call. For me to reach the airport would take half an hour, that means I can leave after 5 pm. I thought shall I take the bike or car. Decided to take the car would be better while coming back with her If someone saw me with her behind me on the bike or she is sitting in the car beside me. I said to Kirit I will be going out took the bike went home. I went inside asked Chitti to make me tea. I drank the tea took the car keys and went to the airport. I had to wait 20 minutes for her to come out. I took her to the parked car and we went to her flat.

Around 11 pm I took her back to the airport dropped her and went home.

Sahithi asked why are you so late. I said I am working on the computer and it became delayed. She said she rang up the factory and Kirit said you had already left. I said I am working at Kathuria, the one that came to the party last week.

She said ok, come have dinner. I said serve the dinner I will come after changing. I thought it is better to have a bath and went and had a bath changed and came for dinner.

Dinner was completed and we sat down in the hall. She asked what were you doing at Kathuria's. I said I was correcting the mistakes in the programs. How do you know what to correct she asked? I said still I am not sure, my brain says where to make corrections and what to make, that's all I know. She said you are a funny person, you did not study programming, you did not have any experience in this field and yet you go to an experienced programmer to make corrections to their programs. I felt a little bit of sarcasm in her words and said I really don't know how I am doing that. Now we have computerized our factory accounts and with that, we can reduce our work by 75 per cent. She said wow, 75 per cent reduction in work? It should save you lots of time for other works. That is what Kathuria said. that is the reason he gave us the program free so that I can work for him. She said I had to see who is this Kathuria. I said when you go to your parent's place you can go over to his office, it is in Kalina. I have been there today. It is a small office with a few staff. But according to what he says, if I can help him he can pay me better in the future.

She must be thinking I am talking seriously or pulling her legs. I said promise I am not telling lies. She knows I don't promise normally, and it seems she believed me. I am not telling lies about the computer programs, so I promised. Sometimes I tell white lies but don't make promises on lies.

I was about to switch on tv she said nothing will be on tv now, so, I dropped the remote on the table. Put up my legs on the table sat back. I thought am I doing right by my work, by reducing the factory work? What is wrong with reducing the work by using computers? Many big companies are dependent on computers. I am not doing anything wrong by using computers. Reducing the workload by using computers is a wise choice. I should get some books and learn to use computers better.

I said to Sahithi let us go to sleep and got up went to the bedroom.

I got up as usual and went to the bathroom and brushed and went to the kitchen made myself a cup of coffee and came and sat on the sofa.

I remembered about books and called Kathuria and asked him where can I get computer books? He gave me an address in Andheri west. I thought I can collect books when I drop Sahithi. I prepared two cups of coffee and went and woke up

Sahithi and gave her a cup of coffee and said today I will drop you don't call for a car. She asked why? I said I had to that side, so I will drop you.

I dropped her at her office and went to the shop referred by Kathuria. I went and looked at some books and brought a few books. I paid and told them to put them in my car. I called Kathuria from the book store and told him what I have brought and should I get anything else. He told me to get some more books. He asked where I am. I said at Andheri west. He said can you go to Vakola. I said I can go there. He said you know the paint company there. I said I knew it. He said go there and meet Jathin in the EDP dept. please see what is his problem. I said I will look into it. I noted down and asked them to give me these books also. I went to the paints company in Vakola. I parked the car outside the gate. I went into the purchase department. The EDP department cabin is there in the corner. I knocked and one person came out of the room. I asked are you Jathin? He said yes. I said Kathuria sent me. He said come in. I went and sat down. He said I am getting this error when I am opening invoicing. I run the program and looked at the error and told him this seems to be a data error. He said normally Kathuria indexes the data files, which would take the whole day. I thought a minute and looked at the data file definition in the code. It has many indexes defined. I thought why the need for all these indexes? I changed the definition of the indexes and removed some indexes which I felt are useless. Then indexed the file. It just took five minutes to reindex. I run the application and the error had not occurred again. I told him your problem seems to be resolved. Then someone knocked on the door, we looked towards the door, some girl is looking through the glass window. He said come in. She came in stood hesitating as someone new is present in the room. He told me I did not get your name. I said I am Kumar. He said to her he is been sent by Kathuria for correcting an error. She said I am planning to join a computer course. Which is better Apple computers or Datapro? He looked at me as I should answer. I said I don't have any idea. He said Datapro they have a post-graduate computer engineering course. I think you can do that. I asked what are they teaching in that course. He picked a pamphlet from the table and showed me. I looked at it but did not understand anything about that. He said to me she is Patel's daughter, she wants to learn computers. You must have some idea. I said I am not from a computer background. We supply packing tins for your paints. He said so you are from that cans manufacturing company. I said yes. But how did you solve this error? Did Kathuria train you? I said no, I have started this thing recently. He asked me to help with some programs. I said to her so your Patel's daughter, what is your name? She said Nishitha Patel. Looking at her I thought she would be suitable for Kirit as both of them were Gujarati's.

I gave her my card and said call me sometime. I gave Jathin a card. I got up and came out. I stood beside my car took out a fag and lit it. Nishitha came out of the gate and came over to me. She said really you are not a software programmer? I said no, I am a manager in a manufacturing company. She looked at the card and said your factory is at Bhandup. Can you give me a lift? Then afterthought asked is it your car? I said yes, any doubt. I thought you might be just standing there if it is not your car. I said it is mine only, I just got it as a gift for some favour I did. I said come and opened the door and she sat down. I went to the other side and sat and started the car. I asked where do you want to go. She said Vikhroli, you are going that way only no? I said I stay at Vikhroli. She asked where near the park? We also stay there. Apparently, she stays the next building to us. I took her to the building and said come I will show you my house and took out the books from the back seat of the car. Seeing so many books she asked me are you going to read all these books? I said I wanted to learn if you want you can borrow some books. She picked some books and we went to our door and I unlocked with my keys. She asked who is there at your house. I said Chitti and kids. I said the kids might be at the school. I came back to pick the bike. I put down the books on the table. Chitti came over said anna do you want anything. I said get me a tea. Asked Nishitha would you like to have tea? She said why the trouble. I said what trouble she had to make for me and she will make an extra cup only. She sat down and said ok get me one. I nodded at Chitti. I said the kid's mother died in a fire accident, from that time she is looking after the kids. My mother brought her from our village, when the kids are a little older we will marry her off to a suitable boy. She nodded her head in understanding. I took out a birthday photo and showed it to her and said it is taken on their last birthday. She looked at Sahithi and asked who is this? I said she is my wife Sahithi, she is working at an interior decoration firm. She said interior decoration, I like it, can I learn interior decoration from her. Earlier you were asking about computers. She it was my father's idea. I said I will speak to her. The firm is at Andheri west. It won't be a problem, both of you can go together. Chitti brought two cups of tea and put it on the table. She said I will go and pick the kids. I said take your keys and go. I am also leaving. After sipping tea, I put down the car keys and picked bike keys. I asked her do you want to read any books. She said not now. We all came down and I removed the bike. She said come and see our house. I said come then take me to your house. She showed me her house and I said I will come some other time and drove to the factory.

I went over to the factory and told Kirit about Nishitha. I thought she should be suitable for you. But how could you meet her? You come over to Loveleen's

office tomorrow. I will bring her there, she wants to get trained there. Any other person I would not offer without asking Loveleen or Sahithi, I thought about you and told her I will take her to their office. He said before you start at your house, you give me a ring I will come to their office.

I sat down at the computer and looked at the programs loaded. One program Rajesh used when training is FoxBase. I run the program and checked. Then I took the book on FoxBase and started preparing small programs. I got an idea and called Loveleen and asked her to get me data on the upcoming elections. She asked what kind of data? I said how many parties are there? How many members were elected in the last elections and what votes they gained? Things like that, which I want to analyse and want to see how the things and what is required to win the elections. She said she will speak with her father and try to get the required information. I said I will come up with something then and cut the phone.

After calling her I formulated a plan and prepared a table to feed that information.

I asked Kirit where are today's orders. He said he already fed them. I said see how easy our work became. He said yes, we could use all this time for some other things.

I kept studying the books and Kirit worked on production planning. Around 1:30 I said let us go for lunch. He said he will order and send a worker to get us lunch. After finishing lunch, we went to the second-floor balcony for our fag. We had a look at the work going on there came down to our cabin. If Mahira had been in Bombay he would have found some work with her. Now she is in Hyderabad and he is not finding any work to do. I thought let us see how he will react once he meets Nishitha. I kept working on the computer and I did not let Kirit play his game. He was waiting for me to get up from the computer so, he can play his game. I did not give him that chance. I kept working until 6 pm. I said I am going home and took the bike keys and reached home. I called Loveleen and spoke to her. She said her father told her they will courier the material to us. She asked what are planning to do with the data. I said I want to analyse the data to see how strong each party is and I want to find combinations to defeat the party in power. She asked how are you going to study all this data. I said I am going to create a program to do that. She said I hope you know what you are going to do. I cut the call and went and had a bath wore a nightdress and came and sat on the sofa. I looked at the books on the table. Took one book and started reading. It is eight pm when Sahithi came house. She looked at me with all the books and

asked what are you doing, opening a library? I said I am studying computers. She said Now it is your new obsession. I said everyone should have one hobby.

I told her about Nishitha Patel and said she wants to learn interior design. I said you will decide after meeting with her. She asked where does she stay? I said she stays at the next building, so she will give you company. She said let us see.

Chitti came and called for dinner. We finished and I took up the reading. Sahithi watched some tv and went and slept.

I kept reading and Sahithi came out and called me to come sleep. I looked at the time it is after 1 am. I left the book and went to the bedroom.

PART 4

Kumar starts business

Chapter 1

Kumar

The elections have come near. I made software predicting the results based on multiple scenarios where Loveleen's father would win the elections. Based on these I advised Loveleen's father on whom he should have alliances and who he should avoid. I also gave them some ideas to attract the electorate and some ideas where they will loath the party in power. It is not that they don't know these things. My advice was when and where to use what at the correct time. The things the software predicted have come close to the results and they have won with an absolute majority. They had to do some minor adjustments with the parties who have supported them but that is another matter. Being in power pulls people. Many from the other parties have shown interest in joining their party. They have called us for the swearing-in ceremony, I have prohibited them from using my name or my software. I did not want them to mention that to anyone else we might have to face some problems later. Somehow the Shakha Pramukh came to know about their winning, you know how things float in political circles. He called me and asked me about the rumours. I could not hide anything from them and I explained how I have used the software in the process to study the election results. I explained to him how I fed the data and based on that data how I came up with ideas. He said our elections are still two years away. But what can we do to prepare for the elections? We don't want to be in the opposition any longer than necessary. I said I know the people are behind you, especially the Maharashtrians. Get me some data on which I can work out. He said he will have the data.

It is three months since Nishitha started working with Loveleen's firm. As I had put my full time towards elections and I had not got a chance to see how things are going with them. I called a party for the success of the election success. Loveleen is in Delhi and I decided to have the party at our place. I called out families and friends and others like Shakha Pramukh. He has brought some top leaders from his party. Loveleen has sent some people from Delhi to oversee the preparations. My father also called some people. Overall it has become a big party. This time we have arranged everything on the terrace. If Loveleen has been here we would have arranged it at Loveleen's place that would have been a different matter. When Kirit and Mahira came together, I asked him how far along his matter with Nishitha had gone ahead. He said none. It is not going forward somehow. I introduced Mr. Patel to Kirit as Nishitha's father. Kirit spoke to him in Gujarathi and they sat down and started chatting. I thought to let

them get to know each other and went over to Shakha Pramukh and his leaders. He introduced me as the man behind the thumping win in the Haryana elections. One of them asked why we did not hear your name anywhere. I said I told them not to bring my name, if he wants to speak to their CM, I can get them a callback. He said please do that. I said then follow me and went to our phone called Loveleen and said these people want to speak to her dad. She said he is a little busy he might give them a second. I said let them hear a hello and you can explain what we did to win the elections. I gave the phone to their leader and he spoke with Loveleen about the elections. Then CM's PA took the phone and said CM is a little busy with finalizing the ministry. He will speak to the CM and arrange a time for a call. Satisfied that they have contacted the CM they believed the use of the software. I said I don't want everyone to use the software, that is the reason I have told them to refrain from revealing it. You have come to me first, I don't want the Leaders in the power to know. I have already spoken to Shakha Pramukh about what I want. If he gets me what I want then I can give you what you want. As the elections are still some time away we have time to formulate our plan of action. Please don't advertise what we are doing, it could have adverse effects. They agreed to my deduction and agreed to keep it secret. I told them to enjoy the party and went to the others at the party. There were some people from Delhi who have come to congratulate me on their success and to pass on some gifts to us. One of the gifts was a house near Loveleen's house. It must be prime property worth crores of rupees. I said thanks and gave it to Sahithi to put them in the cupboard. I am happy my software brought all these gifts. Sahithi did not want to show her happiness in front of the people, she went down to put them in the cupboard. Shakha Pramukh came over and asked me what is it? I said next time we will have the party on the beach. He asked how? They just gifted the beach house. Now they understood what my software has done and how they rewarded me. He said I don't know we can afford such gifts. I said I don't want any rewards from you, your blessings would be enough. They understood my words that I want their support.

Kathuria came up to me. I said how are you doing? Did you get the order you were expecting? He said thanks to you I could bag the order. I said I should thank you for awakening that part of my brain. Now I understand what is software and all. If you have any other requests for me don't hesitate. Where is Rajesh? He said he is somewhere here, I will tell him to meet you before going.

At the party, I announced that I am starting a software firm. At present my partners are Kirit, Mahira and Loveleen. Some people like Mr. Patel and one of

the Leaders have shown interest in investing with us. I told them to meet us at the office. It seems Mr. Patel liked Kirit. He knows about their factory and all. Now they are already shifted to Prabhadevi flat. He said he would like to come and meet his father. As his father hardly comes to the factory nowadays, Kirit asked him to come to his house for lunch next Sunday. I thought it seems Kirit matter is settled. I and Our partners had a short meeting that we could use the new bungalow for our office for the time being. Kirit said we have not seen it. Whatever it might be, we don't want to shift at this time there as children are studying here. Over that this is also our own house, no need to shift at this time. Sahithi also agreed to my proposal. I think she doesn't want to live close to Loveleen's house, and this being her own house she feels secure here. I thought I made the correct decision on this matter.

I met whoever was required to meet and sat down with our group. Some people came and congratulated us. They were asking what we are offering. I said customized software. Anything the customers want we are ready to provide. We want to provide error-free software, as I specialize and talent for finding errors.

They took our cards and went away. Overall the party was a success. After everyone went away we came back to our house. We opened the gifts sent from Delhi. There were obvious children's toys. The house was the biggest gift we ever received. I checked the documents and find they are genuine and authentic. It is situated next to the second house to Loveleen's house last one on the row. I thought we will be close to Loveleen's house. Now she is in Delhi for the last 2 months. I have only been in contact with her through the phone only.

Fully tired I went to the bedroom changed and lay on the bed thinking about tomorrow.

Sahithi came changed and lay beside me. She kissed me and said when you said about shifting your focus to software, I had reservations about our earnings. I thought if you did not earn anything, my income would be enough. Now I am sorry to doubt your abilities. You have proven that you can reach great heights. Go and do your things. I won't object to what you do. You don't need my support, I need your support. I asked her how is the new girl Nishitha? She said she is good, she is picking up the work. After Loveleen went away to Delhi, it has become a little difficult for me to run things alone. I am happy she is with me for support. I said as I am a little free now I will look at your work. We will make a plan to reduce your work pressure. She said please remind me I will give a

cheque for my contribution to the partnership. I said it is a good Idea we collect some investment from our partners. It will be official.

Mahira

After coming back from Hyderabad my interaction with Kirit and Kumar has decreased. It seems Kumar is busy with his computers and he has left all the work to Kirit. Who is alone running the factory. Even when I ask him to give me a lift, he reluctantly comes. Over that, they have shifted to the Prabhadevi area. He literally went a distance from me. Now I am hearing he is interested in some Gujarathi girl, it seems it is Kumar's idea. It seems she is the daughter of the staff of their customers, also Gujarathi. It seems she lives next to Kumar's house. Over that she is working with Sahithi in Loveleen's firm. She is there because Loveleen went over to Delhi, to help her father. Now the elections finished she might come over. I feel I am going out of their inner circle. The announcement of starting the software firm has come as a blessing in disguise. Kumar has included me in the partner's list. That means he has not excluded me from his circle. He still seems to have confidence in me. We have not spoken about the roles we are going to play. He seemed to have decided in the party about starting the software company. Maybe receiving the bungalow as a gift has something to do with sudden announcement. He said he is going to have his offices there for a software firm. We have just seen it from the outside it is an impressive building, better than Loveleen's. seeing that Loveleen would get jealous. Maybe it is her who has selected the building for him. She might want to keep him close. First, she has given him a car and a bike. Now, this. She seems to have a special place for him in her heart. What it could be. I don't think it could be love. She could get better looking, better earning person for her if she wants one. I think she is already married, that is what Kumar has helped her. Maybe his helping her in their politics has something to do with that. I feel she is using him to get her things done. Now she is the CM's daughter. Would she return to Bombay? I don't think in the near future she would return back. Otherwise, she would have delivered the gifts herself, instead of sending through some leaders in their party. Maybe they came over to see who is this man, who has done what no other single person can do. They kept his presence a secret and did not want to reveal it to anyone. Kumar also did not let them reveal about him or his software. Why not let all know about the software? It would give a boost to his software business, which he is starting. He must be having other ideas. Possibly he wants me to market the software or probably not. Let us see what he wants us to do. Does he have any capital? Do we need to invest with the firm to become partners? If Kirit gets involved with the

software business, what he will do about the factory? Maybe Kirit will continue to look after the factory. Until we have a meeting with Kumar we will not know any details.

Chapter 2

Kumar

I went over to the house gifted to me at Juhu. It has a watchman looking after the property. He must be aware of my arrival, he took me inside and showed me all the property. It is an impressive property. I looked over and decided where we can have offices and all. We can have the reception and some cabins in the vast hall area on the ground floor. The rooms on the ground floor can be used for offices for managers and above. On the first floor, we have to see what can be used. I estimated first we need to arrange for the cabins for developers. I called Sahithi and asked her to come and see the house. We want to have some work done here. Next is what equipment is needed like computers and servers, etc. I know the customer who has given us the system will arrange our requirements, I should give him a call.

I think all this should take at least a month to start our firm. I called Kirit and said we all will have a meeting in the evening at our new bungalow.

We all gather at the new bungalow after 5 pm. I showed them the building, rooms and surrounding area. They were impressed by the property. Everyone said it is better than Loveleen. We thought Loveleen's house was impressive, this house beats it by far range. I said it must be Loveleen's idea to get it.

I discussed with Sahithi and Nishitha how the cabins for developers needed to be. They said we should have open tables and chairs placed on one side for the software developers. I said it should be a closed room for providing air conditioner system. We have decided on one side where we can have a wall to wall partition and have a bigger cabin and we can place chairs and tables in two rows. We can provide the air conditioner from the wall. I told them to take the width of the room to accommodate two rows of tables and a walking space. We discussed what kind of tables to be placed. We finally decided they should be handmade than ordered. Finalizing the arrangements for developers, we looked into the rooms where we want to have offices. We planned for a small kitchen or cafeteria for the staff. A small set-up for a gym and a reading room with a library. I asked what else we can have here. She said we will plan as per the demands. I said I want a room where I can take some rest. They said they will

arrange a bed and sofa with a toilet and all. I told them to start the work immediately. Sahithi said they will prepare a plan and costing estimates. Nishitha said seeing these arrangements I am ruing why I have not selected software. I said you can come and work from here anytime.

Now as everyone arrived we sat down for the first meeting of our firm. As everyone knows each other no introductions were necessary. I put up two cheques from each of us as the investment for the firm. I said this will be our contribution towards the capital of the firm. Now it is up to you to invest whatever you want to invest even if it is a nominal amount. Kirit said his amount of investment. Nishitha said his father agreed to invest this amount. Mahira said she did not have much money she will invest a nominal amount. I said I have not talked to Loveleen about her investment, I will let you know when she makes the offer. Now all of you are part of this firm from now on. You take a pledge not to reveal the secrets of the firm to outsiders and it would be detrimental to your own interests. Mahira asked what secrets. I said we will have procedures or software like the one used in elections. Which we will use ourselves and will not sell or give to anyone else to use. Then there will be software code which is the property of this firm. Everyone agreed we should keep the secrets of the firm for our own good. I said I will open an account in my own name for the time being until our firm is registered and we can open a current account on the firm name. One more thing we have to name our firm, please give ideas for the name, and we adjourned the meeting.

I asked the watchman to go to Loveleen's house to get a bottle of whiskey? He said how to get it? I said go and ask her watchman he will get you one. You let him know that you are from this house and it is also her house only. If he wants he call madam in Delhi. Or shall I come and get it. He went over to her house and told me to get it myself. I went over there, seeing me the watchman let me in and I went and asked the servant to get me a bottle of whiskey. He went over and brought it and said I did not know he was your watchman. I said remember next time if he comes over who is he, get him what he asks. He said he will remember. I came back we had our party and we dispersed.

I stopped at Nishitha's house and reminded her about the cheque and it should be in my name. I know Kirit is needed at the factory and with the help of the software he can manage the factory. However, at present time we don't need his help at the firm. Mahira can manage two jobs at present and when the time comes she can resign from her firm. Nishitha and Sahithi will continue their jobs as of now, their services are not required at present and they are needed by Loveleen if she is going to invest with us. I thought of Rajesh, I felt he is a good

developer and I should poach him from Kathuria. But how to contact him is the question, if Kathuria knows I took him over he may not feel good about it. Let us see what else we need for our firm. We need a receptionist and telephone operator, maybe an accountant later. At present we can manage accounts with the help of software. The only problem is how to manage the gifts received in the income tax preview. Might we need to consult a tax consultant? Maybe Kirit's father can help us here. Or we can transfer the house as a capital asset. I have to check the title papers given to me for information.

I went and had a bath and dressed and sat down on the sofa. I switched on the tv and waited for the news to start. When I heard the news, it is the most surprising news of my lifetime. There is a photo of Loveleen, her father and Guru's photo with the news that Loveleen is three months pregnant and her husband has left his businesses and he is joining with his father in law in politics. It seems he was shunned by his business partners and he left and joined politics. Now about the timing of her pregnancy, she was here the whole time in Bombay. Then it struck me that night she has given me a drink, it has something to do with her pregnancy. The only thing I could not understand is why she had to do it that way, if she had asked me I would have cooperated with her. I could not find an answer.

Sahithi had a bath and dressed and came and sat beside me. She asked what is the news? I said Loveleen is pregnant and Guru is back to politics with them. She asked surprisingly pregnant? I nodded my head as if in disbelief. I thought now she won't return to Bombay. Let us see what happens.

Mahira

My brother came back on his regular time off. We all sat together for dinner. I told him about joining a software firm. He asked about my courier company job. I told him I have not yet resigned. I am joining the firm as a partner. He asked how much capital you need to put up. I said they have not asked for any fancy amounts. He said whatever you can put up is enough. Even a nominal amount is ok for them. We have some other partners. Probably they will put up the capital. He asked what are the chances of the software firm. It seems bright. He has already proved his mettle. Have you seen the Haryana elections results. He said the present government trounced the previous government with a majority. I said it is his doing. He has used the software predictability and made them win the elections. He asked is it possible? I said he has shown that it is possible. Already Maharashtra Sena has approached him. He said but the elections are still far away, maybe more than two years. I said you see he starts

the works now for the future. Things can't be changed overnight. That is his outlook. We have seen the results in just 3 months. You can see what he can do in two years' time. He said I can understand that. So, what is he saying? He is taking some of us as partners, who he can work with, it seems money is secondary, trust is important for him. Possibly as per our capital contributions profits will be there but he is not the type to ignore the hard work. I am sure he rewards hard work. My brother said he has some money to invest, if you want I can put up some money. My sister interjected and said I am also ready to put up some money. I said I am sure you will get a good return on your investments. He said please share them with us. We all laughed and resumed eating.

Sahithi

I have gone to see what work is needed at the new office with Nishitha. It is a beautiful building. After seeing the house, I understood how much work he has put in for the elections. The software also helped him come to a decision on certain points. After all this time I am proud of Kumar. The hard work I put in him has at last paid off. I know he has a certain charm and magnetism in him when I first saw him. Now he has proved that he has brains and he knows how to use them. First, it was a car and then bike. Then I thought about what has he achieved she gave him a car and a bike. It seems that was the beginning, now she has given him that beautiful house. First, I thought she gave him for some other reason. Now I understood she has seen his talent and used it for her own gain. Now she is the daughter of a state CM. Now she can offer to give him a house better than hers. This building area is more than her building. He is putting it to good use. Instead of us shifting there, he is using it for starting the software firm. But how much capital does he needs for the firm? How much can he collect as capital? Will it be sufficient for the firm needs? What will he do if the capital is not sufficient? Now we have to calculate costs for preparing the office. Then he needs to buy the computers. Will he make it with his software firm? Or he thinks Loveleen would invest in the firm to help him out here. At least they will be safe for the next five years. But if the firm is not there by the next election, can they win that election without his help. Maybe they will save the firm for that.

We have to prepare the estimates for the work at his office. Let us see what are the primary estimates for the office setup.

Kumar

We watched tv for some time and I went lay on the bed thinking am I doing the correct thing by starting the firm? Will the capital will be sufficient for running the firm? It will not be cheap to turn the house into an office with computers and everything. The payments to Loveleen's firm can be delayed or converted to capital in her name. What about furniture, computers and other things? Can we offer the same? Where will we get the capital for all these things? I don't know when I slipped to sleep. I awoke with a start. I thought why did I wake up from sleep. I turned to where Sahithi is sleeping. She is hard asleep. I remembered what I had dreamt. Loveleen has come home with her kid in her hand. I asked her why did she that, she could have asked me and I could have done it willingly? She looked at me with a disgusting face, seeing that face I woke up. I felt like that face is still following me. That disgust in her face, I have never seen anywhere. Even Sneha's parents would not have looked at me like that.

I lay back on the bed. All my dreams filled with her face.

Kirit

I have contacted Nishitha's father. He is impressed by what I have achieved during my work at the factory. When Kumar announced that he would like to start a software firm with us as partners, immediately Mr. Patel has offered to invest with us. that shows he has confidence in our firm. That is another good sign. When he asked to meet my father, I asked him to come to our house. I have to inform my father and mother about inviting them. It is lucky as we have already shifted to Dadar. He would be impressed by our flat there.

Kumar

I got up from the bed went to the bathroom and brushed and came to the kitchen. Loveleen's face again came in front of me. Is it not going to give relief to me? I am getting disgusted with myself thinking about that face. Why did I see that face? Have I been thinking about that when I went to sleep? Is it reflecting my mood rather than what the actual truth is? Only Loveleen can remove the veil from that.

I fixed myself a coffee and went and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv. News has already started and they were showing the interview with her husband. He is saying he is happy about his wife pregnancy and he wants to participate in state politics more. I did not hear what he said. I thought is he really the father of her child. What happens if he gets my looks and her brains? What people would think if the child is born dark or with south Indian looks?

Would Sahithi suspect me? Would she think that child is mine? What would she do if she suspects that? I think only time will tell.

I got up and went to take bath and dressed and came out. Today I have to go with Sahithi to get estimates and get the work started. I also have to get the account opened and deposit the cheques. When will I receive cheques from others? First thing I will spend the money on computers. I can delay the payments to Loveleen's firm or ask her to adjust the amounts in capital.

I prepared a cup of coffee and went and woke up Sahithi. She took the coffee and sipped and looked at me. Why did you sleep early last night? I said I just laid on the bed and I don't know when I slept. Come on get up, you give me estimates, and start the work. She asked what about the payment? I said what payment? You can start the work without advance payments. You check with Loveleen. She said I will do that. When she finished her coffee, I pulled her out of the bed and said go for a bath. She took her dress and went to the bathroom.

Now we are starting a software business I should have a computer at our house also. When I have free time, I can work. Maybe I can work on something I don't want others to know. Like I created the software for elections. It should be kept at home only. Then I remembered I put five lakh rupees in the cupboard. I went and opened the cupboard with the keys and removed the cash. I thought I can use it for ordering the computers. I will put this as their shares in the firm. Whatever profits will go to kids only. When Sahithi came after the bath I showed her the money. She said where did you get. I said it is children's share for the company. I will put this money in the children's name. I will purchase the computer by paying the cash. I will drop you and go to his office and order computers. If I pay in advance he should give us an extra discount. I thought one by one my problems are getting cleared. I should not worry about money, it will get pulled to the firm. I know I can do a lot with our firm. I have political backing. I have the required knowledge to run the company. What else does I need?

We finished our breakfast and tea and we went down. I took the car keys. Sahithi asked why the car? I said I am going to get a computer for myself. I need one at the house. She thought a few minutes and said good idea, you can work at home until the office is ready. I said I am going to keep this computer at home only.

On the way, I stopped at the customer office. He welcomed me and asked do you need another computer? I said we need computers, we are starting a software firm. We need computers, today I need one computer for my home. I

put the amount and said this the advance for the computers. Keep them ready by next week, I hope I will get some discount for the advance payment. He said certainly and phoned to send a computer to his office. Now he addresses Sahithi and spoke for some time. The computer is brought and is placed in my car. We went to Loveleen's office.

I told her to prepare the estimates for the work and I will go home and set up the system.

I went over to the house parked the car in the parking lot. Nishitha came over saying you left me and went away. In the urgency to go to the computer dealer, I have forgotten to pick up Nishitha. I said sorry I forgot about you, Sahithi should have reminded me. Come I brought a computer let us check it out. I picked computer and monitor and gave her the keyboard and the cables to carry. I put them down at the door and opened the door called Chitti to take them from Nishitha. I put them on the table. Now I need a computer table and chair. I told Nishitha to wait and went down and drove to the furniture dealer. I have already purchased from him our house furniture and for the hotel also we purchased furniture in lots. I asked for a computer table and chair. He showed me some models, I choose one I felt comfortable. I told him to deliver it to my house. I told him to send me the bill I will send the payment. I told him we are starting a software firm and we might need tables and chairs, be ready to supply our requirements. I said it is better for him to start an account for us.

I went to an electric shop and bought a power strip. I went back to the house. Took the UPS and power strip to the house. Within half an hour the furniture shop owner sent the table and chair. I put the table near a power source and connected the UPS. Then I set up the computer, monitor and keyboard. Now I need the software, I had to copy from the system at the factory. I asked Nishitha are you coming to the factory? She asked what work do you have there? I said I had to collect some floppies to feed into this computer. She said let us go. I picked the car keys and we went to the factory. I took her to our cabin. Kirit was surprised to see her there. I said I forgot to take her to their firm. I brought a computer, I came here to get the software floppies. He said they are here and showed me the floppy box. I picked it. Kirit is showing her the office and explaining the things. He said I will show her the factory and come. He took her to show the factory and I picked the floppies and went over to the car and sat down. After showing her the factory he brought her to the car. I said I am using the five lakhs given by Sneha's grandfather for purchasing computers. He asked you still kept the cash? I said I thought I will put it in a fixed deposit but could not get time. Now I am using the cash for purchasing computers. He said good, I

will arrange for the money in one or two days. Also, Mahira said her brother and sister are chipping in for the money. I said If Loveleen would have been there it would be another matter. She would have covered our money matters. Did you see yesterday's news? He said he did not. Now she is pregnant and I don't know when she will come back to Bombay.

I said let us go and started the car and drove to my house. Nishitha asked how long are you two are working together? I said something over 7 years. When I came to Bombay after my degree, he has given me a job at his factory as an assistant manager, he was a manager then. When he went over to Nasik on a work he made me manager. When he returned from that time we are working together. Now he has to look after the factory himself. But I made his job easier with the computer. I hope he is satisfied with that.

We reached home and I parked the car and picked the floppies and we went home. First, I installed OS. Then installed the software. Then copied the programs I have created. Now the system is ready for my usage.

Sahithi

Where did Nishitha go? I forgot to pick her up in the morning. She could have come on her own, what she is doing? I will call Kumar and see. I called the home number. Chitti picked up the call. I asked did Kumar come home? She said he came and went out and got the table and chair and then again went out with Nishitha. I said ok is Nishitha with him? she said I hear the sound of the door they must be back. Here speak with Kumar anna. He said hello, I went to the factory to pick floppies. Nishitha is with me. I will drop her later at the office. I am just setting up the computer. I said to drop her at Juhu, we will do some work there. He said ok and cut the call.

Kumar

Nishitha asked you were talking with Kirit about the money, do you need it urgently. I said no such urgency, I got five lakhs for the computers, there is no urgency now. she said I will get the money from my father, but I did not know how to pass it on to you. I said to prepare a cheque in my name and pass it to me. She said I will do that.

The phone rang I picked the receiver and said hello. Shakha Pramukh spoke on the other side, I rang up factory, Kirit said you are home. So, I rang up here. I asked tell me what I can do for you? Our party approved to appoint you to advise us on the matters of politics and the like, they asked me to send you 10

Lakhs as advance payment for your services. I am sending some sample data with the man. Can you look at it and tell me what else you need. I said I will be at home, you can send it here, you know the address. He said I know the address, I will send you there. He said thanks and cut the line. I thought the problem for capital is solved for the time being. With the money, they are sending we can complete the cabins and furniture works. How fast are things are moving?

After half an hour the doorbell rang I went and opened the door. A man is standing outside the door. I said come in, he came in and sat down on the sofa. He looked around. The house was remodelled by Loveleen recently. He said very good colour combination. I said my wife works for an interior decoration firm. He said good taste and handed me an envelope. I took the envelope and looked inside. There were some papers. He said there is a cheque also in that. I removed the papers and put the cheque aside and looked at the papers. They were figures of various parties' election results. I said for the time being these would suffice, if I need anything I will give a call. He looked at the computer and asked a new computer? I said I just got it, I am installing the software. He nodded as if he understood. He asked I heard you have helped in the Haryana elections and helped the new ruling party to win elections? I said I had a hand in advising them about some matters. He asked if we follow your advice will we have an edge in the elections. I said I will guarantee your party will win the next elections. I don't have any confidence in the present government. I feel there is something very bad is going to happen in Bombay. I can see dark clouds over Bombay. I stood on the top of the building. The building is very high. I am looking down from there. There is a big chawl in front of me. There were black smoke rising from there at many places. One place the smoke decreases another place it starts. Someone says see it is burning there. Then I looked down to the street. One old Muslim man walking on the road. He is looking like a typical Muslim. With a long flowing white beard, white cap and kind of white churidar and pyjama dress. He walked a little and fell forward, there is a knife in his back. Then someone told something to Loveleen, she had that disgusting look. I stopped my talk and I felt like I came out of a trance. I asked him what did I just say. He repeated what I have just spoken. I thought that is the reason for Loveleen's disgusting look. Someone told her something, I could not remember what. I said tough times are ahead for the state, inform the government, do something. Tell them to be ready for it. Something really awful is going to happen. He said I will take leave and went away. I thought where is that place? I could not place it, I have never been there.

Hearing all this Nishitha asked are you a soothsayer? I said what? She said who can read the future. I said it never happened to me like this. Sometimes I see things in a dream, then when it happens I feel a déjà vu. But this is the first time I could remember all this. I have been getting up with a jolt for the past few days. I could not remember what is it, I have been getting up. I when I was speaking with him I could remember the things happening in front of my eyes. What else can I do except warning them about the events about to happen. What is that you are talking about Loveleen's disgusting face. I had that dream last night, I got up and remembered only her look. I thought she was looking at me disgustingly, it is not the case, it must be something. Now my mind is at peace. She asked your mind at peace when all this is going to happen? I did not get back to sleep after seeing that look on her face, all this time I was thinking she likes me as a friend and when I saw the look on her face, my heart broke. Now I feel like I am back to my former self. She said you talk funny, I did not understand a thing.

I have some work feeding all this into the system, do you want me to drop you at the office? She said if you don't mind can I feed this into the system? I said certainly you can do it and showed her how to feed the data into the system.

Sahithi called again and asked why did you not brought Nishitha? I said I got a call from Shakha Pramukh, he sent some data and advance payment. She asked how much? I said ten lakhs. She was silent for a minute. I had to ask her Sahithi are you there? She said yes, so when are you bringing Nishitha? I said she is doing some data entry work, you do without her for today. She said ok, I will do that and cut the call. Nishitha asked did he bring a ten-lakh cheque? I said yes. She said then I think your immediate payment problems are solved. I said yes.

Chitti came and called for lunch. I asked Nishitha will you have lunch here? What do you have for lunch? I looked at Chitti. She said rice, dal and curry. Nishitha said I better go home, I prefer to have roti in my lunch, I said it's your choice. She got up and said I will have lunch and come and she went away. I said to Chitti serve me. I finished lunch and started feeding data into the system. Nishitha came after one hour. She told me to get up and she will complete the data entry. I got up and went down for a fag. Looking at the car I remembered Loveleen. In the dream when I saw that look on her face, I thought she is disgusted with me and that is why she did those things. But she had that look for something else, what it could be? Whatever I told him will they happen in real life? What is that burning and black smoke rising to the sky? Are there houses burning in that chawl? Most of the houses in the chawls are temporary houses. They are not pucca houses. Very few people have pucca houses. Also,

the fire spreads fast in those places. Close proximity is one reason and the use of combustible material is another reason. Where is that place? I couldn't place it. If I have not seen that area, how could I see it in my dream? Will these kinds of dreams become real? Or should I take it as a nightmare? Finishing the fag, I went to the house. I picked a computer book start reading it.

Chitti came over asked anna do you want tea. I looked at the time it is after 4, I asked Nishitha do you want to drink tea. She said normally I don't drink it, after this work, I need tea. I told Chitti to get me two cups. She went into the kitchen. I asked Nishitha how is the data entry work, hard work? She said it is a little hard, why do we need this data? I said to analyse, we need to know what are the trends in the state. Why having lots of support, they are not able to win the elections? She asked how will you know from this data? I said for that we have software, it will give us different scenarios. We have to select the best scenario and put it to the test. She asked but if it fail in the test? Then we have to choose another scenario. She asked do we get to test multiple scenarios? That is the reason we had to start early. When in Haryana, we did not have a lot of time, only three months, I have advised accordingly. Here we have around two years, so we will check the pulse of the people and test our scenarios. If there is less time there is more chance of failure. If we have more time then fewer chances of failure and more chances of success. It is lucky we got successful results there. If we did not get the expected results we would have been in the soup. It was also our first try with this software. I was testing a theory, and it was successful. That is another reason we got better returns on our work. That is the only reason we could start this software business. I can see the results now, see the advance we received today. Seeing their success, these people have sent the advance. I remembered I have to open an account and put all these cheques into the account. I think we will do that tomorrow. The bank will be closed by the time we go there.

Chitti brought us tea and we sipped. Nishitha put down the cup and resumed data entry. I went down for my fag.

I finished the fag and snubbed it on the floor and was about to go up. Chitti came down the stairs. I looked at her, she said I am going to bring the children home. I said will take you there. She said what is the need it is very close. I said just let the children enjoy the ride. I checked the pocket, the car keys are in my pocket. I started the car and told Chitti to sit and rode to the children's school. I stopped outside the school. Chitti went and picked the kids and came back. Seeing me in the car they shouted daddy. I said come and sit we will go home in the car.

Sahithi

I prepared the estimates for the cabins and tables set up for Kumar's office. I called Loveleen and said Kumar is saying to start the work without taking any advance. She asked for the details of the work and costing. I explained to her what he needed at the office he is going to start at the new house gifted by her. She said the project is our internal work only, provide the required office set up and everything that he needs without collecting any advance and don't ask him for any payment until she says so. If she requires any money, she will provide her. Get it done as soon as possible, take extra workers necessary.

Did Kumar speak to her about starting the software firm and adding her as a partner? It seems she already knew what Kumar is going to do. She is asking our firm to provide all the assistance for this software firm. She is ready to pour in money for them. That means that firm is their lifeline. That means until they are in power we will not have to look back. We have to save when the going is good.

Kumar

The kids were jumping in the car. So, I drove the car slowly. We reached the home in 5 minutes. Chitti took them out and up. I parked the car and lit a fag. Seeing the kids happy has made me happy. Is that what I want in life? Do I want to see the kids happy? Or do I want them to have everything in life? They should not suffer like me. I remembered when I had to look for five rupees for sharing the rickshaw with Sneha. How I felt when I had to say I could not get that money. How Sneha had to walk with me for two days in a week that too for two years, even though it was her idea to walk with me. But she had to endure for two years because I could not get five rupees for a month. Now I am ready to spend five lakh rupees just on computers, even though it is the kid's money. I know I will return back many times of that money back to them. Sneha has already put some money for them. I will do the same for them. I will not let the kid's money go to waste. It just struck me that they should start a newspaper. I made a note to inform Loveleen. I got down from the car locked and went home. Kids were making merry and jumping. I went to them and stopped them. Seeing them Nishitha was laughing. I said to the kids go and change and came and I sat beside Nishitha. I asked her how the data entry is going on. She said almost finished. I picked the phone and rang up Loveleen. Her servant said she went out somewhere. I said to tell her Kumar called. He said he will pass on the message. I cut the call and called Shakha Pramukh. I told him we should have our own newspaper. It is very important to inform our electorate about our

ideas and what we are going to do and what we expect them to do. We can put the price at the lowest or give it free. He said he will speak with his leader.

Nishitha announced that the data entry is completed. She asked what are you going to do now? I said I will process the data, it may take some time. I closed the data entry screen and opened another program. It asked for a password. I entered the password and it started to run. She asked what is happening? I said it is crunching numbers. Nothing is seen on the screen she said. We will know when it finishes. I called Chitti and asked her to get me a cup of tea. I kept looking at the computer screen. What is my next move? What kind of software shall I make in the software firm? Shall we get orders and start development or develop a product and sell it in the market? Can Mahira get us any orders? Do we need orders and can we maintain our company with the current political orders? Then what is the need for a software firm, this work I can do from home? I have to do something else. I have to employ some people and be their boss. I can't work under anyone. I need to be the boss. That is why I was feeling stifling when working under Kirit. Even though I was given the manager post I was not the boss, I had to report to his father, then he returned and became my boss. Chitti brought a cup of tea and handed me. I sipped the tea and looked at the screen. We should have an official meeting and decide the future course of action. This political work I will keep for myself. I will not involve anyone in that. I put down the cup. I called Kirit and told him and we all the partners should have an official meeting and decide on the firm. What should be the name? what kind of business model we should have? What each partner should do for the firm. What should be their share of profits? He said he will inform Mahira. I have not met Sunitha for the last two months. I have not informed her about the software firm. I will inform Loveleen about the meeting. As she is one of the partners I should inform her of our decisions if she could not attend the meeting. Then I have the work of opening an account. It seems the process I run with the data is completed. I quit the program and shut down the system. She asked me aren't going to look at the output. I said no. I have to get approval from the customer to look at the output. I rang up Sahithi and asked when are you coming? She said it might take another half an hour. I asked her shall I come to pick you up. She said please pick me. If I leave now I can reach by the time she will finish her work. I looked at Nishitha. She said she will go home and had to speak with her father about the share of the capital.

We came down together and took out the bike. She asked how do you decide what to use? I said it depends on the work and time. When the rush time I take out the bike if more than one had to go out then car. If I have to bring

something like computers, I take out my car. She said you have point, don't forget me tomorrow. I said I will try to remember.

I drove to her office, by the time I went she had completed her work. She handed me our office plans and said check it out and I will ask them to prepare the costing. I said first you tell them to prepare the costing, I will have a look. She went and informed them to complete the costing first. As Loveleen has given orders to start the work immediately without collection of advances, costing is not much important.

She came back to me and I had suggested small changes for the sake of easy working. I asked her what would be the cost of central a/c and separate a/c for the offices. She said she will enquire about the costs. I said I want a board room or meeting room also. It should be for seating of at least 20 members or more. She asked why so much seating is required? I said I don't know what kind of meetings we can expect in the future. We should always be ready for any kind of occasion. We will go tomorrow there and see how these plans look at the house. You also order your people to start working from tomorrow. I spoke with our furniture guy if you want any support on that he is ready to help you out. He will also provide tables and chairs in other cabins. I told him open an account for us. I want these works complete as soon as possible. I want to show off our offices to these leaders. I want them to know we are serious about our work. They already gave a 10 Lakh cheque, so we have to show them some work for that amount.

The next day I went to a nearby bank and said I want to open an account here. As we have not registered our company I want to open a personal account at present time. I gave him a copy of the house deed and said this our office, he asked for a reference to signing I said I will get them signed and took the forms and filled it up and I signed my signature and put my account number with another branch. I paid whatever cash need to open the account and deposited the cheques I received. He checked my personal cheque for matching with the reference signature. He said he will give chequebook by the evening and I came back to the house. I asked Sahithi are you ready? She said she is coming in five minutes. I took the car keys went down waited at the car. Seeing me at the car, Nishitha came running. I said I will not go away without taking you. She accused me yesterday you went without me. I said that is why we could spend some time together and you could help me with the data entry. She said that is also there. I also visited Kirit's factory. I told my father about Kirit's factory. One more thing my father gave this cheque for the contribution towards company. I looked at the figure it is for 5 lakh rupees. I thought it is raining money now. I

asked whose names the shares should be you or your father? She said my name only, he gave me this cheque and said it is my duty to look after the interests in the firm. I said if you are part of the firm you will also have a say in the working of the company. We will have a meeting and decide the name and the firm type, partnership or limited company. Then we will go for registration. I already opened an account in my name at the bank for this and deposited my cheques. We will deposit this cheque on the way. Sahithi came down and said I thought where have disappeared, came down for a fag? They both sat down and I started and drove to the bank. I deposited the cheques and the manager gave me a chequebook. I told him to expect some more cheques deposited as I am expecting cheques from more people. I will transfer all this money to our current account once the firm is registered. He asked how come there is a cheque from Maharashtra Sena? Are they also partners? I said not partners, they have ordered our services. What kind of services he asked? I said I can't reveal our business dealings. I have to take their permission. He said ok then, get the registration process completed fast.

I came out went to the Juhu office. We again reviewed the plans. First, tell me where we will have our meeting room. We checked all the rooms and none of them would be big enough for it. I said instead of cabins on the hall try to fit a meeting room here. She said with the available space we will have a round table conference room instead of a rectangular one. This way we can accommodate more chairs and we can use the area without compromising the look. We can use the rooms on the ground floor for our software developers. I said See how many developers we can accommodate in each room. Based on that we can label rooms for usage. Small rooms we can use for Server room, single-person usage room like MD room, Sales Director, Project Manager, etc. then bigger rooms where at least two tables and computers can be placed. In the bigger room, we should have at least four computers be placed. Prepare a new plan and let me review it.

Sahithi rang up her office and spoke about the change of the plans. In the hall, I want a Conference room on one side and a reception table opposite the main door or the other side to the conference room. See how they fit in each place and get me the plans as soon as possible. We have to start the works immediately. She must have asked what is the urgency. She said they have to start the operations yesterday. Can you do it or not. Then she put down the phone. Let us go to the office and see the plans.

We went to the office and sat down in Sahithi's office. She called and asked about the plans. She said to bring the rough plans, no problem. The girl brought

the rough plan. I looked at it. One side the conference room and another side the reception area and in the middle sofas for the visitors. I said this plan looks perfect. Finalize this. She took away the plan to prepare it. I said check what are materials needed and labour. I want glass and blinds on the inside. So, if we don't want the outsiders to see who is there we can close the blinds. Did you check about the central air conditioners? It should not be water-based like they use in cinema theatres. Water-based will have an adverse effect on computers. It should decrease the humidity. She said I will check the pricing.

For the tables check with the furniture shop, I will give you the number. I gave her the number and said to give my reference. Better tell him to come to our office and check the requirements. Fix a time with him to come and be there at the office. What else do you need? If you need any money tell me, I will arrange immediate payment. I called the computer dealer and asked him can you get the networking done? He said he has the workforce for that. I said send your men to look at the requirements for our office. I want networking done here. He said he will send someone. I said to Sahithi I am going home to finish some work on the computer, when you finish your work give me a ring, I will come and pick you up. I took the car keys and went back to the house. I switched on the system and checked the program run correctly or not. It seems it had converted the data into systematic data, now the program can interpret the data. I ran the report program and checked the output. It has given me some scenarios which can be interpreted into actions. But I felt it is not the correct time to put them into actions. What with my dream and other things, I thought I should refrain from contacting them at this moment. Let us see how the future unveils.

The phone rang I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Sunitha, she said Kirit told me you are not coming to the factory. I said we are starting a software firm in partnership, I am busy with the works. She said so what are doing at home? I said I got a computer at home. I am checking some software. So, when are you coming to Bombay, I have not seen you for at least 2 months. She said it is because you were busy, not because of me. I said okay, I will accept it is my mistake, first, tell me when are coming? She said tonight I will be in Bombay. I said will see when I can get out. I will come and see you. She asked you were telling about a partnership, we are all there? I said at present Sahithi, Kirit, Mahira, Patel and Loveleen. She asked who is this Patel? I said Nishitha Patel, they stay near our house, she is the daughter of Mr. Patel who works in the Paint company. She asked ok, what about me? I asked do you want to be part of our firm? She said yes. I asked then how much are you willing to invest? She asked I have to invest? I said yes, Mr. Patel invested 5 lakhs. Sahithi also

invested and I already got an advance of 10 lakhs. Then Loveleen got us the house beside her house, which we are going to use for the office. She said let me check my bank balance, I will let you know about the investment. Ok, see you. She cut the call.

Chitti came and asked shall I serve lunch? I looked at the time it is after 1:30, I said serve me. I had lunch and went down for a fag.

I stood beside the car and lit a fag. Now, what do I have to do? I have to collect from Kirit and Mahira. I have to see what will they invest. Then Sunitha, I don't know she will invest or not. Loveleen is already committed to supporting the development of the office. What else can I expect from others?

Finishing the fag and snubbed it and went to the house. I sat down again checked the report. From the report, I deduced that they should stand alone in the elections. They can't take along any other party, because as a party they can alone fight against the ruling party. If I say that now, they will think they have wasted money. Over that, we have to look into two years from now. We have to imagine what is the atmosphere in two years. I have to tell them that I will give them another six months for getting the next report. I rang up Shakha Pramukh and said at present your party is looking strong as it is. You don't need anyone's support. If the elections are conducted at this moment you could at least get a simple majority. You can continue your promotions which you are doing. I want to you check again with me in six months. I feel there will be major changes in the political scenario then. I think your man has already told you about my dream. I still feel we have to be careful about that. I never had that severe intuition about anything. Let us keep on eyes on that front. It could be to our advantage or disadvantage. It depends on how we can manipulate the situation. I will meet you later to discuss the situation, and cut the call.

My next thought is about how to meet Sunitha. I can't make it there at night. I don't have a pretext of going to the factory. I can only go there tomorrow morning. I will drop them at the office and can go to her flat. That is the only chance I will have. I sat before the computer and started developing software. I want to prepare a software for total computerization of the factory. I want it to order from vendors to deliver and prepare invoices. I want every process to be computerized. First, I started with receiving orders from customers. Slowly started building the data files required. I continue working on the database file.

The phone rang and I lifted the receiver and it is Sahithi asking me to pick her up. I looked at the time it is 5 pm. I called Chitti asked her to get me a tea. I finished drinking tea and dressed and went down with the keys. I lit a fag

started the car and went to the office. I reached there in forty-five minutes. I went inside and looked at the works going on. They have started building a partition for the conference room. A wooden partition will be for a height of 3 feet and a glass partition of eight feet and the top will be covered by a false ceiling. I remembered we need an intercom for the offices. I said to Nishitha to ask Sahithi about the intercom. Check with their vendors.

The computer vendor had sent his men to install networking. I looked around we have new technology that we can install the Networking with intercom. I said do that. Coordinate with the interior decorating people for the installation. I already gave him advance payment so money is no problem there.

I asked Sahithi are you coming home? she said she is coming, gave some instructions to the men and we went home. When I opened the door Atul came running calling me daddy. I picked him up and put him on the sofa. Reena came over to me I picked her put her on the sofa. I asked then did you go to school. They replied yes. I asked what did you learn in school. Atul said ABCD. I said now go and have a bath, Chitti came and took them away.

I switched on the tv and started watching it. After some time Sahithi came after having a bath. I took a towel and went for a bath. Dressed and came and sat before the computer. I wanted to develop software for running the factory from a to z operations. I wanted to have a software where Kirit can do everything with minimum work. First, I wanted to develop a database for this software. I started creating tables in FoxPro. I brought this software from the vendor. I have created masters, it took me more than one hour. Sahithi came over and said dinner is ready. Completing dinner, I came and sat before the computer. It took another two hours to complete the tables. I switched off the computer and thought I will do the rest tomorrow. I went and sat on the sofa. Something is running on tv, I stared at the tv absentmindedly.

I switched off the tv and went to the bedroom lay on the bed, thinking when can I meet Sunitha. When Sahithi came and asked are you sleeping, I opened my eyes and no, not sleeping, waiting for you to come. Have you completed your works? She said yes. She sat down on the bed and asked what happened? I said I am thinking about the firm. I am getting capital which should be enough to run the company. I wanted to have a meeting then decide about the company name. What is your opinion, what should be our company's name? She asked how about Kumar and Associates? It would mean it is your company, your brainchild. Or you can name it in the children's name. I said how about Atul Kumar & Associates. She said that is also good. But here you are ignoring Reena.

I said then it could be AR Kumar Associates. She said see what others are saying about the name.

She switched off the lights and lay beside me and asked how are you feeling? I said I am feeling ok, why? She said I thought you were having problems, you did not come close to me for some time. I said I thought you were having some problems from the time of Sneha's death. She looked into my eyes and said you thought I am having problems and I am thinking you were having problems, both of us thinking about each other and keeping each other away. I pulled her close we were thinking about others that is what?

I got up early and had coffee and sat down in front of the computer. I worked for an hour on the program. Then switched off the system and went for a bath. After dressing I prepared two cups of coffee and woke up Sahithi and gave her a cup and sipped the other. She drank her coffee and went to the bathroom. I rinsed the cup and put it on the stand and sat down and switched on the tv for the morning news.

The phone rang and I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Loveleen, I said what is the news. She said I am coming back to Bombay on 1st November. I looked at the calendar and said in another ten days. She said yes, I want to be back in Bombay before the winter sets in here. Yes, you told me the winters would be brutal there. She asked how the works going on at the new office. I said they just started today. I want it to ready as soon as possible. We are planning a meeting to decide on a name and other things. I will plan it after your return. She said ok, we will have a meeting then.

Sahithi came after having a bath, I told her about Loveleen's return to Bombay. She said she will have a little breathing space. I thought will Loveleen takeover her work in her present condition? Is she really coming over here to get away from the cold of Delhi? She has endured the cold her whole life, what is a little cold for her? She must be coming over here to get away from Guru. Her father took back Guru to show the world that he is the father of her child. She must have agreed to her father's idea for political reasons. Now she is coming back because she doesn't want to be with him. Will he come to Bombay with her? Let us see, how this goes.

Chitti brought the breakfast and put it on the table. I called Sahithi for breakfast. She came and we had our breakfast and had tea. I took the car keys and went down telling Sahithi to come down. I went down and lit a fag and waited for her to come down. Sahithi came down and I asked where is Nishitha? I looked at her house, she is coming slowly. When she came near, yesterday I told you what is

the need for running, so you are coming slowly today. She said nothing like that and went and sat in the car. I looked at Sahithi, she went and sat down. I sat down and started the car and rode to the office. I dropped them and went to Sunitha's flat.

I opened the door and entered, Sunitha is still sleeping. I went and kissed her on the cheeks. She did not move. I shook her and said wake up. She opened her eyes a little and said you never let me sleep. I asked did you come here to sleep? Then you sleep, I am going. She said I am just joking, don't go away. I said I am also joking, will I go away leaving you? I kissed her and said let us have a go.

Having spent I lay back and lit a fag. Sunitha said I will go to the bathroom and come. She got up and went over to the bathroom. I thought how long can I continue this? I am getting busier by the day. Can I offer to provide time in the future? Can I find another way to continue with Sunitha? Because of the elections, I could not meet her for two months. Her work is the main problem, she comes to Bombay only once in a fortnight. I have to make her change her job, that is the only way out of this. She came back after brushing, I said get me a cup of tea or coffee you were having. She said I will get coffee and went to the kitchen. She came back and handed me a cup, I took the cup and sipped and looked at her. I asked her what you thought of becoming a partner? She said I have not checked the bank balance. I said I have not asked about how much you want to invest, do you want a partnership in the firm? She said certainly, I am only thinking of how much I can invest. Then why don't you leave the job and join me in the firm I asked her? She asked surprised work with you, what can I do? I said anything you want, you don't have to go away from me. You can be with me forever. She said I don't know anything else other than being an air hostess. I said until you try you won't know what you can do. You can be anything. I am not asking you to decide at this moment. I want you to think about this, when the time comes you can join us. She said I will think about it. I said that is the spirit. Come sit with me, I have lots of work, I have to go.

I asked did you have breakfast. She said I did not have anything for breakfast. If you told me I would have brought something. Get up and dress I will take you out, you can have something. She said I will have a bath and come. I said come fast.

I took her to brunch and then I dropped her at her flat and went home. I sat before the computer and started my coding. At 1:30 Chitti came and called me for lunch. I finished my lunch went down and had a fag and came back and continued the development. I worked until 5 pm. I called Chitti for a cup of tea

and rang Sahithi at our office. She said work is going in full swing, come and pick me up when you are free. I said I will come and pick you up. I switched off the computer and got up. I went to the bathroom, freshened up and dressed and went down to the car.

It took me one week to complete the software. I took it to the factory and replaced the existing software with the new software. Copied the data from existing software into the new software. I checked the software and made some corrections and made the software in working condition. I called Kirit and showed him the software and what it can achieve. I told him with the old software we have reduced the work by 75, per cent now this will reduce the work by another 15 per cent. Now you will have more free time, use it wisely. He said I am missing you here. I said we can't forever do this. I have a lot to achieve in my life. I don't want to waste my time working in this factory. Don't think otherwise, I know this factory has brought me up to this level, but there is more to achieve in life. I know what level I was at when I came here. I have nothing with me except Sneha, whom I have lost. Now I have Sneha's children, Sahithi and Sunitha with me. I also have Loveleen and you as friends. I know you will support me with our software firm. I don't know what the future holds for us. But I know it will be bright for all of us. We will all be partners in that bright future. Loveleen is coming back on 1st of November. We will have the meeting then. Sunitha also wanted to be partners with us. Now I am not thinking about the money. You and Mahira said you will contribute to the capital. I am not asking for the money. I have already told Mahira only nominal capital is enough at this time. Why nominal I am talking? it means you are with me in this. That is all I want, you are all with me in this venture. Remember I want to take all of you with me into the future. I got up and said check the new software, I made it just for your convenience. I will meet you all at the meeting.

Chapter 3

Kumar

It is the day of the meeting. We are going to inaugurate our conference room with our first meeting of the firm. I ensured that Sunitha will be present on this day. Every one of our partners will be present. I went to Sunitha's flat and picked her up and brought her to our house. Sahithi did not speak to her at first. I made them patch up and they were on speaking terms. Kirit said he will bring Mahira with him. Loveleen can just walk over to the office. I will pick up Nishitha while going to the meeting. We all went to the first meeting of our firm.

After regular puja and ceremonies, we entered the office and we sat down around in the chairs. Our first order of business is what type of firm we have to incorporate. We all agreed it should be a private limited company. The second order of business is the name of the firm. Sahithi proposed AR Kumar and Associates Pvt. Ltd. Loveleen seconded that and everyone agreed after that. The third order of the business is the expenses incurred while setting up the company. Like interior decoration, networking and intercom systems, setting up offices and computers for each office and development. As most of the costs are borne by the Loveleen firm, Sahithi submitted the expenses for the full set up of the offices including furniture and computers. She also submitted from where our costs are met. Like I have paid five lakhs to the computer vendor. I also paid from the capital account I opened with my name. After submitting the accounts of pre-registration, they have approved the accounts and costs. Now, whoever has not submitted their money towards capital have submitted their cheques. This building is gifted by Loveleen we have decided to transfer ownership to the firm name. It will be part of the assets and capital will be in my name. The expenses paid towards setting up of offices borne by Loveleen will be transferred to her capital account. Mr. Patel has offered the services of Ms. Pauleen Fernandes for the post of receptionist. She has taken the minutes of the meeting and said she will prepare the minutes and will send each one a copy of the same. For the time being, she will update the accounts of the firm, it will be easy because she has to feed them in our software. I have taken up the work of registering the company. I contacted a CA firm for this purpose and gave them all the relevant information. It took us a week for the completion of the registration. We have received the registration certificate and copies of certificate of incorporation. now our company is registered and can start operations. With the certificate of registration, certificate of incorporation, and

gift deed transferred to the company we opened our account with the bank and transferred the balance to the current account.

In the meantime, I contacted Rajesh and offered him to work with us as a developer. All of our partners are appointed as Directors. Mahira is appointed as Marketing Director, Loveleen as Director, Sahithi as Director, Kirit as Director, Sunitha as Director. I myself being appointed as Managing Director. I and Mahira would be full time working and other directors will be needed to attend board meetings to decide on the matters of the company. Each one of them provided with offices and they can come work with us at any time. So, this way we set up the software company. We have decided to start our operations from 1st December 1992.

On 16th November Sunitha visited Bombay and we spent some time together and she went back to her duties. I have to wait for another fortnight.

Chapter 4

Mahira

After a long time, I got a chance to prove my mettle. I have been appointed as Marketing Director. Even though I have not got any staff under me, Kumar has given me the authorization to appoint staff as I require. All the other partners are only part-time directors with the firm, he has provided them with the offices in the hope they will come and work with us. Maybe he thought if he has offices then he can appoint other staff and allot them the offices. I have to see how I can sell the software. He has provided us all with the visiting cards. He seemed to have a constant supply of money, he has not spared any expenses. He already has guests coming to see the offices and setup. Maharashtra Sena Pramukhs have visited the offices to speak with Kumar. They all sat in the conference room and admired the look of the entire office. There is a gym, kitchen and rooms to take rest and every imaginable comfort are provided.

He sat with them for 2 hours discussing something. Some of them are smiling and some have very serious faces. I did not understand why these mixed feelings are on their faces. Some are happy and some are not.

Kumar

The first order of business is with Maharashtra Sena Pramukhs. They have come to understand what we were doing with their money. Some thought we were wasting their money on the decoration of the offices. Then when I explained what I have prepared the reports from the data, they were happy. Those people who had knowledge of what we have achieved in the Haryana elections are happy that when the time comes they can use formulas developed by the software can be used. Those who have reservations about the software were not happy but they did not have an alternative so they put their serious faces.

Overall it was a fruitful meeting for our firm. When it was the time for them to go I warned them of the coming dangers to the state and especially for Bombay.

I checked the accounts fed by Pauleen. I checked the bank statement as of 30th November. We have a balance of 20 Lakhs in the bank. We have fixed salaries for me and Mahira as directors in the board meeting. At present we have only two staff members, Rajesh and Pauleen. They were given appointment orders and when they saw the salaries offered to them, they are more than happy.

Now I have to give Rajesh some work. I told him to look at the program I have developed for Kirit. See if he can make any improvements in the program. I gave him a seat in the four-seat room. We have room for another 19 members and 10 cabins for single table rooms. This way we can accommodate 30-member staff and managers and we some more rooms in the first floor which are at present not set up for and I put some beds for anyone to take rest. I am planning to use my room there for a living if required. If Sahithi throws me out of the house, I will have somewhere to go. I always think ahead and plan ahead for unforeseen events.

I looked around for a house for Sunitha. This area is more populated by Catholics. They did not have any portions for renting. I thought it would be better she does not stay close by. If the staff or someone sees her with me then it may create problems and I left the idea.

As she already staying near the factory it was better that way. Now Loveleen's stomach was just showing. She must be four months pregnant now. She has given up the Interior designing business to manage to Sahithi and Nishitha is there to help her. Nishitha picked up the work and helped Sahithi with the day to day management of workers and other things. Loveleen spends much of her time at our software offices and manages her business from there only. It has become her second office. Our main aim at present is reducing the electricity bill.

Days were running busier than ever. I was dropping Sahithi and Nishitha at their office and going to my office. Sometimes Kirit used to drop Mahira and spend some time in our office. We used to discuss the factory and he is looking for an assistant.

I went over to Vakola Shakha Pramukh to discuss the current political scenario. We discussed the goings-on and I gave them some tips on run up to the next elections. We have discussed using the Shakhas to increase the supporters. Presently Maharashtrians are supporting the Sena, but we have to increase the support from other groups. Like minorities and the migrant population. I explained to him that minorities and migrants are supporting the ruling party in the state, if they can shift their loyalties they will be in a winning position. This I could deduce from the data collected from where minorities are the majority population. They could be a small per cent of the population but they could be decisive in some constituencies. He agreed with my deductions and said we need to monitor those areas. It just could be to make them feel safe and secure in their daily lives.

From behind, there was a voice saying, sir. I looked back a boy of 20 years of age, tall and thin stood behind me. The Shakha Pramukhs said come Krishna what is the problem? He was asking some favour and I did not catch what he is saying because of his Marathi. I asked Shakha Pramukh who is he? He said he is Krishna he stays in the chawl behind the market. He is having some problems with the neighbours. He said to him call him here I will speak with him. I called Krishna and asked him what are you doing now. He said he is learning ac repairing. What have you studied he said 12th. I said I have some work for you, will you do it. He said tell me. I said there is a factory in Bhandup, the manager needs an assistant. We were both working together but now I have shifted to another field. He feels like he is left alone. I want him to have an assistant. There won't be much work as we have computerized everything. He will teach you how to use computers. He is a good man at heart. His father also left the business to him. He said I am ready to do anything. I said then I will take you there if you are ready. He said I will inform at home and come. I said I will wait for you here, come quickly. He came after fifteen minutes, he changed and came. I said bye to Shakha Pramukh and told Krishna to come. I opened the car door and he came and sat beside me. I started and drove to Bhandup. He asked did you buy this car working in the factory? It seems new. I said it's new only two months old. I got this as a gift. He asked who would give a car as a gift? I asked do you follow politics? Did you read about the Haryana minister had to resign and elections declare and they lost the elections? He said I read the elections were won by another party. Yes, we have done something which leads to the events. I have got this for starting the events which lead to the minister's resignation. So, what are you doing now he asked? Now I am running a software development firm, we have our offices in Koliwada. He said I know someone there, the last building on left is where D'Souza lives. He used to come to the typing institute for repairing typewriters. I said if I see him I will remind him that Krishna remembers him.

I stopped at the factory and went to the cabin. Kirit lifted his head and asked what are you doing here? Came to update our software? I said not that I have brought you an assistant. I said he is Krishna. Kirit said sit down and asked him questions. Then said I will put you on the test for some time. If I am satisfied, I will make you permanent. I said that's ok. I know he will do better than expected.

I asked are you joining now or you going back home. He looked at Kirit and Kirit said you can join when you like. He said I will come tomorrow. Kirit said ok. I

said then come I will drop you at the bus stand. I dropped him at the bus stand and went home.

I went home and asked Chitti to bring me a cup of tea. I switched on the computer and changed the parameters in the program. I run the program for processing data. I got up and went down for a fag.

Finishing the fag, I went back to the house and looked at the screen. The program is still running. I went and sat down on the sofa and switched on the tv. I watched tv for some time and went and looked at the computer screen and the program completed. I run the report program and studied the changes in the output. I sat there thinking what the changes in the output mean. How it will affect the future.

Chitti came and said lunch is ready. I said serve it, I am coming. I washed my hands and went and sat at the table. I finished the lunch and took the car keys and went down. I started the car and went to my office. I stopped the car outside the gate, looked at the houses on the left side. At the end of the lane, there is a two-story tiled building. I thought that must be D'Souza house Krishna was mentioning. When the watchman opened the gate, I drove inside parked the car and went inside to my room.

After working for 2 hours I got up made myself a tea in the pantry and came back to my room. Finishing the tea, I looked for a fag and the packet is empty. I came out and looked around on the opposite side there is a paan shop. I went and asked for a packet. I took the packet picked one lit it and looked around. One fat and short fellow is standing on the balcony looking at me. I thought he must be Mr. D'Souza. I shouted are you Mr. D'Souza. He said yes. Krishna from Vakola told me about you. He asked do you want any typewriters. I said we don't want typewriters we have computers. He said that you just set up the offices in the building. I said we have set up a computer software firm here. Does Loveleen madam work with you? I said she is one of the partners here. He said my daughter finished her degree, if you have any job please tell me. I said then send her to me, I am Kumar. He said thanks, I will send her tomorrow. I snubbed the fag and went back to my room.

I completed the work by five pm. I rang up Sahithi are you ready to go home? She said it will take another one hour for her to finish her work. I went to the beachside and sat down with a fag looking at the sea.

I looked at the time, I was sitting here for the last one hour. I got up and went inside made a call to Sahithi, she said she is ready to leave. I took the car keys and went to Loveleen's room. I knocked and opened the door. She is laying on the sofa. I asked her are you sleeping? She said no, just taking a rest. I asked how are you feeling? She said fine, no problem at all. I looked at her stomach. A slight bump can be seen. I asked how many months? She replied 18 weeks. I asked did you get checked? She said yes, the doctor said everything is fine. I said ok, I am going home, bye and left the room.

I went and started the car. The watchman opened the gate I drove towards Andheri. I picked up them and reached home.

It is 30 November. I got a call from Sunitha. She called to say she reached her flat. I said I will make up time to come to her. I dropped Sahithi and Nishitha and went over to Sunitha's flat. When I entered she is preparing breakfast. She asked do you want? I said I had and came. I sat with her when she is having breakfast looking at her. She asked what are you looking at. I said I am seeing you after two weeks. I am missing you and you are coming home after two weeks. How long are you working as an air hostess? She said nearly four years. How long can you work as an air hostess? She said I have no idea. I said there must be some rules regarding this. She said there must be, I don't have an idea. I asked why don't you come work with me? She asked work as what? I said anything which you like. I want you to be in front of me. She thought for a minute and said I don't know, let me think. I said all other partners I have given directors positions. They will be available for our board meetings. I did not give you any position because I don't know when you will be available. We can't have our meeting around your time in Bombay, that too you will spend sleeping and winked at her. Think about it whenever you want to leave your job, you think about my offer. She said I will certainly keep you in mind when I am thinking about what to do next. I asked do you want to have tea? She said yes. I went into the kitchen to prepare tea. I thought do I really miss her when she is away? I may not miss looking at her, but I miss her companionship. I would like to kiss her, hug her and like to spend time with her. But I don't miss her really. What will I do if she comes works for us? If she is in front of me the whole time, what would I do? Can I kiss her? Can I hug her? Maybe not. We have to find time or place to do those things. But if she is close to me I would feel good, that is for sure. I filtered the tea into two cups and brought it out.

We had our tea and went in to the bedroom.

Chapter 5

Kumar

6th November 1992. I was sitting in my office room speaking with Rajesh about some software development techniques. The telephone rang and it is Shakha Pramukh on the phone. I said what is the news? He said you did not know, the Babri Masjid has been demolished by car sevaks. I said what? He said the Babri Masjid in Ayodya has been demolished. I asked what will happen? He said we don't know, I want to know your software can predict anything. I said can it predict anything, I have to check, this is a new turn of events. Let me see. Then I remembered the dream. I think there would be riots, that is what is going to happen first thing. Which will lead to very bad things for the state. I feel some grievous things are going to happen. It will not stop there and the repercussions will reverberate for the foreseeable future. He asked are you telling all this from the software? I said it is not the software, I am reading the future from the actions of today. I will come over tomorrow to speak with you. You warn other Shakha Pramukhs what will happen. We will speak later and cut the call.

I told Rajesh Babri Masjid has been demolished and I think there will be hell to pay.

The next day after dropping Sahithi and Nishitha at their office and came over to Vakola and met Shakha Pramukh. He said protests over demolition have started and the Best busses are being stopped at Kurla depot. I asked how far they will go in this? He said we don't know. We have advised all to refrain from inciting their people. You are taking the correct steps. If they take out any kind of protest to the higher levels they would be the ones who will suffer, remembering my dream. He said if they try to incite religious fervour our people will not leave them alone. I said that is what I am worried. How are the Muslims in this area? Here they are minority and Catholics are more than them. But their population is sizeable. Let us see how things go on. I got up and went to my car and drove over to my office. I did not see any busses on my way. I thought how people will go on their jobs without bus services. After reaching the office I called Sahithi at her office. She said she did not have any problem, but she heard that buses are plying with would be problem with the workers. Most of them have not turned at their work places. I will speak with Loveleen about the situation. I went over to her room, she is not there. I came out of the office and went over to her house. She is sitting in the hall. I said I went over to your room looking for you. She said I did not go there. I heard some problems with

transportation. The busses were being stopped. I went to meet the Sakha Pramukh and there will be some problems all around Bombay. I was told most workers were not turning up at work. I don't know how long this will go on. She said I will send a car to bring them back here. From here you can go home together. I said I will be in my office and went over to my office.

I made a round of the property and looked at the security of the building. It seemed secured enough. There were not many entry points into the house. One in the front and one in the back. I thought it is secured enough.

I went inside the office and asked Rajesh where are you staying? He said at Dadar. I asked you can go by train? He said yes. I asked Pauleen, she said Vakola. She can manage.

Sahithi and Nishitha came over in half an hour. I said to Rajesh and Pauleen and I will drop them on the way. I dropped Rajesh near Vile Parle station and Pauleen at Santacruz police station and we went over to our house. I said to Nishitha you better miss the office for three-four days. We will see after that.

The next day we were lazing around watching the tv. My father called and said how is the area? I said peaceful around here. He said why don't you come over here with kids. We are fortifying our colony. I said I will see if the roads are safe to travel I will come over. I called Shakha Pramukh and asked if it is safe to travel to Wadala from here. He said if you can avoid Kurla you can go over. I said Sahithi we will go over to Wadala, ready the children. I took them in my car we went another way bypassing the Kurla area to Wadala. They have got approval to install spiked walls around the colony. I have been there a few times, but never stayed there longer than a few hours. This is the first time we came over to stay over. We went to the seventh floor by lift. The children were enjoying the car ride and coming to the new place. It has a kind of children's park and swing and the like for the kids to play. We went to the house, it has three bedrooms and a long hall and a kitchen. There is a kind of veranda to link the rooms, bathroom, toilet and kitchen. There they have clothes lines for hanging the clothes to dry. There is a balcony in the bedroom. Which looks out to the main road. There is a compound wall and on the other side, there is a chawl. I remembered my dream. I saw the chawl burning. The road outside the gate where I saw the man being stabbed. I went and called Shakha Pramukh and told him about the area where I have seen the things from my dream. This area is exactly like what I saw in my dream. The coming days are very critical.

My father was telling how they got the approval to install the spikes on the compound wall of the building. He was in the civil department in Telecom and it

was easy for him to get the approvals. They are going to take turns to watch the colony in the night.

My mother is very happy as she could get time to spend with the kids. She likes Atul very much, she did not let him out of her sight. We spend our time watching tv. I rang up Loveleen and asked how she is doing. She said she is doing fine. She went to our office and no one has turned up, so she asked the watchman to lock up the office and close the gates and stay inside. I told her to be careful and ring me up if she needs anything. That day passed fast with kids playing. In the evening we took the kids to the park and played on swings and other equipment.

After playing at the park we took the children back to the house. They had their dinner and went to sleep. We sat on the balcony and looked out to the city.

The next morning, I got up brushed and went to the kitchen. My mother readied filtered coffee. I made a cup of coffee and came and sat in the hall. I switched on the tv and watched tv. The situation in the city has not come back to normal. There were sporadic events throughout the city. The telephone rang I picked the receiver and said hello. It's Loveleen. I said what happened, she said I am getting scared to stay alone, why don't you come over here. I said I am at my parent's house in Wadala. Why don't you come over here, if your driver is there you come with him or you can drive yourself. She said ok I am coming over. I remember seeing her disgusted face, it would be here only.

She came over in an hour, I got the watchman to let her in and showed her the parking area, where she parked. I picked her bag and brought her to the house. Seeing her Atul came running Aunty. She caught his hand took him to sit on the sofa. My family has already met her at the kid's birthday which was celebrated at her house. And they knew she has given me the car and bike. She removed a whiskey bottle from her bag and gave it to my father. She gave the kids some presents.

The next day around 11 am Sahithi called me to look at the Chawl which can be seen from our balcony. I went over there. There is thick black smoke rising from many places around the chawl. If one place the smoke decreases at another place it rose into the sky. I looked down to the street. I saw the Muslim guy I saw in my dream walking across the road and he went a little further and fell forward, a knife was stuck in his back can be seen. I thought what I had seen in my dream had come true. Why Loveleen had that look on her face I had to see. The telephone rang and someone lifted the receiver and said hello. They called Loveleen and gave her the receiver. She heard what the other person said and

her face became chalk white and she had that disgusting look on her face. I went to her and asked what happened? She said some rioters had entered her house and destroyed everything on the outside of the house. She said at least they had not entered the house. I don't know what they would have done to my house. I said it is lucky you were here. I don't know what you would have done if you were there, you might have opened the door and shouted at the rioters.

I rang up Kirit asked him how is the atmosphere there? He said he gave the factory a holiday. Some workers were staying in the factory closing the main gate. There were not many incidents in the area. Our area is also calm. I said we had some problems in our area. Some houses in the chawl were burning and some people were killed around here. We will know some more when our maid comes for work. He asked does your maid stays in the chawl. I said yes, she works at many houses in the society. She has not come for the last two days. Ok, I will speak later and cut the call.

In the night I woke up again with a jolt. I thought why did I wake up. I tried to remember what the dream is about. Finally, I remembered seeing black clouds. What are the clouds and where I saw them, I couldn't remember. When no one can say, I know. The next morning, I called up Shakha Pramukh and told him about the dream. I said the last dream I told you had happened yesterday. I don't know what these black clouds are about. How is your area? Are there any riots are anything? He said small incidents are reported and our Sena soldiers are trying to keep our people safe. I told them not to incite any hatred themselves. Only defend if anyone tries to attack. I asked about Krishna, he said you have put him at a factory. He is happy with the work. He said the factory was closed for the last two days. I said he has told me they closed the factory and staying indoors. I said I will call later and cut the call.

I thought at the present rate the situation will only worsen.

For the next week, there were some days of lull and some days of violence. We were able to work for those days of a lull. I spoke to Kirit, he said Krishna was with the group who were trying to keep people safe. They were making rounds in the chawl they were staying to ward off attackers, especially in the night.

I heard there were some rioting in the Vakola area. Sahithi was concerned about her parents. I took her to her parent's house. They were safe and some of the Sena Soldiers were keeping the area safe from attackers. Once when they attacked some people these soldiers went on a rampage and attacked the properties of some Muslims.

Slowly the attacks came down and people started go to on their business as usual. Still, the people were tense and people were scared to venture out. Still, some of the people made groups and were guarding their areas in the night.

Chapter 6

The year 1993 month of March.

Kumar

Due to the riots and all our work took a backseat. Last month end the CM has resigned and the ruling party is in the process of electing a new CM. At last on the 6th of March, a new CM was elected and taken over the state. Everyone thought that the state will be back to its old self.

Sunitha had a problem during her duty and she has come back to Bombay. She was temporarily suspended from duties and was asked to attend a hearing at the Bombay office. When she has returned to Bombay, she called me. I went over to her flat and she is looking sad. She said she was suspended and was asked to attend a hearing. I said it could be a blessing in disguise. If they permanently suspend you could stay back in Bombay and we could be together forever not like this once or twice a month. If they suspend you they would put you on ground duty, then you can be in Bombay and we could meet daily. Even if they remove you from duty, what will happen at the least you will be without a job, you can contest their claim, you can go to court. You can come work with me. There are endless possibilities. Don't worry about the result, think about what else you can do. She agreed to my suggestion and I asked her when she need to attend the hearing. She said she will know in two days.

After two days she rang me up and told me she was given 12th as the date of hearing and she had to go to the Air India office at Marine drive. I told her I will take her to the hearing. I asked her what time is the hearing she said it is 2 pm.

On 12th March I picked her from her flat around 12 noon and we proceeded to the Air India office in my car. We neared the office around 1:30. I said we have around half an hour for the hearing. As we were nearing their office my left eye started to flicker. As we reached the gate it has increased and I felt a bad omen. It is said flickering of the left is a bad omen for men. Instead of entering the building I went ahead and took a U-turn and went back toward the house. We must have gone 2 or three miles, I heard a sound of a boom. I stopped the car on the side and looked back. There was smoke billowing from far. We went to Sunitha flat and I have switched on the tv. There on the news about the bomb blasts around the city. When we heard there was a bomb blast on at the Air India building, we hugged each other with relief. That we had been at the door of death and we beat it. She said because of you I once again beat the death.

Why did you turn back at the office? I said while nearing the building I had a very bad feeling and took a U-turn instead of going in. I called Kirit and said to him we are safe at Sunitha's flat. I told him about going with Sunitha for her hearing. He said you had beaten death. I told Sunitha to call tomorrow your office and inform them you did not attend the hearing. No need to call now, they will be busy with the news.

I called Shakha Pramukh and asked him about the bomb blasts. He said there were many blasts at many places. I told him my experience at the Air India office, I saw that smoke in my dream. I was wondering what it was about. Now it has become clear. Is there any news of who is responsible for these blasts? It is not clear yet. We will know by tomorrow. I told him to let me know when something is known and cut the call.

I said I will come later and went home. I called Sahithi from there and asked about everything ok there. She asked what happened? I told her about the bomb blast around the city and said her place is safe? She said everything is ok. Where are you calling from? I said I am at home. I came to check something on the home computer. When I switched on the news, I heard about the bomb blasts.

I cut the call and called Loveleen she said hello, I asked her did you hear about the bomb blasts. She said I heard about it. I might have heard the sound at Hotel Juhu Centaur. They are saying there are many bomb blasts. I am getting scared. I said they are all placed at strategic places it seems. Don't panic, I am at home, I will come there and cut the call.

I took the car and went over to the Sahithi's office. I picked her and Nishitha and went over to Loveleen's house. She is now seven months pregnant. Her stomach is prominent and she has put up some weight. Even though I was seeing her daily, I could see her gaining weight. We went in and sat down on the sofa. She came slowly from inside and sat in front of us. I said I don't know how long this will go on. It might stop all the rioting and everything after this. Or it might restart with these bomb blasts. There is no guarantee that more blasts will not happen. At least now police will be on their toes to catch the culprits. I have been telling Sena Pramukhs about the impending doom from the time I have been in contact with them. It was like they were helpless in these situations. They have been reining in their people but the other side is relentless. Sometimes situations go out of control. There were heavy casualties from either side. I don't know the correct figures but the other side has heavy casualties

from riots. But these bomb blast figures would be very high. We will know in two or three days.

I asked Loveleen would you be comfortable here or you can come over to our house. She told she prefer to be here only. I said then we will give you company for some time. I know I told Sunitha I will come back, but for Loveleen's sake, I had to sit here in front of her. We started for home after 6pm. The roads were almost empty as people left for home early it seems. We reached home and I let them get out and said I had small work to complete and went over to Sunitha's flat. I opened the door and went inside. Sunitha is sitting on the sofa watching the news. I asked how many bomb blasts? She said at the latest count 12. I asked did they say who was behind this? It is not yet announced. I said there was some talk of Dawood Ibrahim is behind this. She asked do you have to go back. I said I have some time, how long you will be here. Call your office and find out, what they decided. Don't worry about whatever decision they take, either way, it is to your advantage.

After half an hour I left for home. while going back I picked a bottle of whiskey and went home.

Due to the bomb blast, there was some confusion about Sunitha's hearing at the office, she was still serving a suspension and was receiving her monthly salary and she is missing her perks. It is not much problem for her as I was meeting her regularly and it's enough for her. She did not mind the suspension as I was getting to meet her regularly. It seems she is getting accustomed to being at home, maybe she will decide to stay back and work for us.

The day is 21st May and Loveleen had been getting contractions and we had taken her to Leelavati Hospital. She is taken to the labour room and we waited outside. At 1:15 pm the nurse came out and announced she had a son and we can go and meet her. We went inside and saw the baby. I could not make out who could be his father. It might take one to two months to find out the likeness. If he gets my likeness, what would people think? Let us wait and see. I asked her what are you going to name him. She said Dhruv. I called him Dhruv and rocked him for some time and handed him to her.

I said I have to look after a project and went back to the office. We got a Hospital software project through Shakha Pramukh. I gave the project development to Rajesh and gave him two more developers to work with him.

It is just the starting of our software company. It is the first project and we are in the process of starting off on our projects. This project would just make our

company break even this year. Last year riots and bomb blasts have put a dent in our plans to get more projects. Now Mahira has left her job in the courier company and working full time as Marketing Director. I let her choose her team to work and she has chosen two salespersons on a low salary and commission basis. One girl and one man. They have yet to get us any projects. I am trying to get Sunitha to work with us. I offered her a position to look after the operations. She is yet to decide on it yet.

We don't have any problem with our working capital requirements, so we are continuing to run our company. But we need some projects very soon. At least for the sake of partners.

I called for a meeting with Developers. I asked for the details of the project. After looking at the progress of the project, I decided I should take ownership of the project. I have been ignoring the development from the time the project was received. If we have to complete the project I need to work with them myself. I looked at the data tables developed by them and asked them to make some changes. They said they will make the changes and come back to me.

I called Mahira to my room. I asked her how her team is doing. She said they are trying to get some projects. I said trying is not good enough. Your team has to pull up their socks and get some projects immediately or you can decide what to do with them. I think their way of selling is wrong. As a Marketing Executive, you think, how the software should be sold. Don't look at sales from their eyes, think from your perspective. Think why they could not get a project. Think about what they are selling. Software is new to India. People were not aware of what they could do with the software. You take Kirit's factory as an example. I was telling him about computerization for a long time. He did not go ahead because he did not have any knowledge of computerization. It is our duty to make them aware of computerization. We have to tell them the advantages of having software to run their companies. It is not our product we have to sell, it is how fast they can take decisions based on the software. How fast they can get recoveries or outstandings. We have to tell them how that can make their life easier. Have your courier company had computerization? She said they had only billing software in the beginning. But after it was taken over by an international company, they have started complete computerization. I asked what things have they computerized. She said they have created a tracking system for packets. Every movement of the packets are computerized. They can track the packet where ever it is placed. For this, they had to computerize the branches also. So, from what I understand, this process is an ongoing thing. I asked her can you get them to use our software firm to computerize their branches. I think

their software is provided by their international company itself. But to computerize the branches they need some set up who can go to all their branches and install and check and train the users. Now in the US, they have the internet to share the data. We don't have any such thing here. How they are going to share the data across branches? So, computerization will not be as effective as in the US. See what they are doing to computerize the branches. She said I will check with them, how they are going to do that.

I said this way we have to create opportunities. You get me a meeting I will explain to them the ways of doing that.

She said I thought you did not know marketing? I said really, I am not a marketing person, I am talking from the perspective of a developer.

She got up and said I will see what I can do and went to her room.

The telephone rang, I lifted the receiver and said yes, Pauleen said sir, Loveleen madam is on the line. I said give her. Loveleen said hello, I said hello what happened? She said my father wants to meet you. I asked is there any problem? She said he did not tell me. Can you leave tomorrow morning? I said I have to get tickets. I think you can arrange for tickets. I said I will try and I will inform you after the ticket is booked. I thought about how to get the tickets immediately. I thought of Sunitha, I think she could manage the ticket. I called Sunitha and asked can you manage a ticket for tomorrow morning. She asked for whom? I said I was called to Delhi. She asked can I come along? I said why not, book the tickets and inform me. She called me after half an hour to confirm the tickets are booked. She said the time of the flight is 7 am. I said I will pick you up. I called Loveleen and informed her that my ticket is booked for tomorrow at 7 am. I went to the developer's room and told Rajesh to look after the work as I will be away in Delhi and I don't know when I will return. I also informed Mahira about my going to Delhi.

Next, I called Sahithi and informed her about my going to Delhi as Loveleen told me to go to Delhi.

The next morning, I took the car and reached Sunitha's flat and from there we reached the airport. I paid for the tickets and we got boarding passes and passed the security check and sat at the boarding area waiting for the boarding announcement. I said I think this is the second time we are flying together. She said yes.

The boarding announced for boarding and we went and sat on the seats.

We reached Delhi and when we are coming out, I saw my name on board. I was not expecting them to send the car but I went to him and he took us to a hotel. He said a room is booked for you, put your luggage and come down I will take you to sir. We went in took the key to our room and put our luggage and came down. The driver took us to the CM's office. We had to wait for some time before we were told to enter his room. We went inside, he was sitting behind the table and he got up and shook my hands and said I heard a lot about you. Thanks for saving my daughter during the riots. I said I have taken her to my house, nothing else. Whatever, she told me how you had helped her when she was down and feeling helpless, it has also helped us. How did you get the idea to trap Guru? I was thinking about doing something for her for a long time. When the opportunity fell in my lap I just took it to help her. He said it has helped her with Guru and has also helped our party. It is the turning point for our party. I said thanks. He said we should thank you for coming up with that brilliant idea. However, we heard my daughter gave birth to a boy. I said yes sir, he looks cute, should take after your daughter. Congratulations sir. He said thanks. He looked at Sunitha and asked who is she. She is our Operations Director, one of the partners. How is the firm running? I said we are just starting, thanks to you we have running capital for another year at least. What is this I heard about you having a premonition? I said first I saw the riots and my dream, but we could not do anything about it. But when the Air India building blast we both escaped in the nick of time. He asked who is this both? I said me and Sunitha we were about to enter the building, I had a bad feeling about it and took a U-turn and we just went two or three miles we heard the bomb blast. I think we were very lucky, otherwise, we would not be sitting in front of you. He said about your company, give us some ideas for the software we will think about them. I said I will certainly do that sir.

He said the reason I called you is to thank you personally and to give you this. He gave me a sealed cover. I said thanks and took the cover and held it to the side. As he has not said anything, I said can we take the leave, sir? He said you can and we have booked the room for two days have a look around Delhi if we need anything we will call you. I said thank you and came out of the room. Sunitha asked what is in the envelope? I said I don't know, we will check once we are in the room.

We went and sat in the car.

We opened the envelope it contains some government bonds and a deed for a house. The house is situated between our office and Loveleen's house. I think he wants to be close to Loveleen after what happened during the riots. I showed

them to Sunitha. She checked the bonds and said it is for 10 Lakhs. I said these can be sold in the market or can get principle at the time of maturity. We can keep them until we need working capital for our company. The house can be used for residency or if we want to open another office or business we can use it for that. I think we are in a better position now. Now let us go to our room. We went to our room and changed and sat down before the tv. Sunitha caught my hand and snuggled and sat beside me. She said after how long we were sitting like this. I said sorry, I was busy from the time of starting our firm and our electioneering and you were busy with your work.

The doorbell rang and got up and opened the door. The driver was outside. He said Sir called you to come. Sunitha got up he said not you madam, sir called him to come alone. I said you take a rest, I will go and come. I dressed and went down with him. He took me to their conference room. There were some ministers sitting around the table. I went in and sat at the chair they showed. One of them said this is a critical matter. I think one of our ministers was trapped by the opposition. He had a relationship outside of wedlock and it seems she was sent by the opposition party member. I asked did anyone contacted him? he said nothing like that, we were suspecting they are looking for an opportunity for doing that. The first thing we have to do is who have to make sure she is not contacted by anyone. It is better to shift her out of the city or even better out of state. She should not be able to contact anyone. Next, where is he keeping her? One man said it is one of the buildings of the minister. Now in her place, we will put someone else. Some other lady who follows our orders. They looked at each other. One of the men said where we will get that lady at a short notice. I said I had someone in mind don't worry, I will stay with her. If they try anything to expose her, they will fall on their face. One of the men said who she is? I said the lady who came with me, she is our operations director. She would do what I tell her. She will do for this operation. I will take her to the house where she is staying. Something like in a burka and the lady who is staying there will come out in the same burka. When she goes away I will go and we will not be seen outside. She will act like the other lady, she will not let outsiders to see her face or something like that. You do that we will do the reverse play on them. One of the men said how long will this take. We don't have to worry about time, they have to worry about it. When they could not contact her, they will think she was caught or something and they will bring news or police or someone like that to expose him. Instead of that, they will find her and me there. They could not do anything and they have to return. One thing is that they expect the minister to be present at both times. When we bring the burka lady and burka lady goes out. They will wait until the minister is

back at the house again. The second time we will plan as if the minister is checking some of our software plans. It should be like they have disturbed his work. You give me the details of his department and we will plan something for his department. They told me to wait outside and after discussing they called me in and said they have agreed to my plan. One of the men asked when we should carry out this plan. I said we should not wait and immediately start the operation. You arrange for a burka and I will go and wait at the hotel. You send the burka and we will replace the lady at his house, it is your responsibility to look after the lady for the time being. They send the driver to get a burka. The driver took me back to the hotel. I told Sunitha to wear the burka, I will explain everything later. We packed our bags and she wore the burka and we went to the house of the minister. The minister was waiting at the house. Sunitha removed the burka and gave it to the lady. The lady wore the burka and she and the minister went away. I warned them to check if anyone is following them. If they suspect anyone is following them, the minister should get off and let them take her to where they planned to keep her. If anyone was watching outside it will look like a burka-clad woman was brought to the house and she was taken out by the minister. The lady who was staying was not moved from the house and she was at the house.

We unpacked the baggage and settled ourselves in the house.

I called our office and told Pauleen to give a message to my wife that I will be in Delhi for some time. I will call later and cut the call. I don't want anyone listening to the call to get any names.

I closed the curtains and closed windows wherever not required. We sat before the tv and cozied up. We spent two days like this. I thought it is time for the action to start and called the number given to me to give a green signal. It means they can send the minister. I have not expected on the first visit they would take any action. It happened as I thought. He made the next visit after two days. Nothing happened on that day too. We kept the papers strewn around the table and sat. it happened on the third time the minister visited. After 10 minutes of his arrival, the doorbell rang, I went and opened the door. The minister held some papers in his hand sat on the sofa. Some people pushed me aside entered the room with cameras running. Seeing the minister on the sofa with papers in his hand, they stopped. He asked is there any problem. Sunitha has turned the other side when they entered. They were trying to take her pictures. One person said madam look here. She turned and they took her pictures. One person said she is not the one. They shifted their attention to the

bedroom and went and took photos of the bedroom, finding no one there, they checked the bathroom. He came back and said no one is there.

The minister showed his anger and said what is happening? You people don't let me work. He removed the papers and put them in the briefcase and said we don't have any privacy here. One person asked what are you doing here? The minister said can't see I am working here. I am explaining to this gentleman about some work. He asked who is the lady. I said she is my partner. We are discussing some important matters. Seeing they did not get what they have come for, they left the house and went away. I went to the minister thanks for the cooperation. He said it is my pleasure, thanks for whatever you did and he went away. The next day there was a news report about our meeting with some photos but they could not get any traction on that as we are a software firm and we are only trying to get some work. The news died down after that day. We waited for another two days and went back to Bombay. Before going back, we got a contract for a project, with an advance payment. Sunitha and I have spent a week together and our contract has strengthened our bond with the party.

Chapter 7

Kumar

We returned with a big fat cheque, Bonds and a house in our name. I dropped Sunitha at her flat and went home. I showed Sahithi the cheque, bonds and the house deed and asked shall we shift or stay here only. She said she will think and tell. She asked me what have you done there to get all this? I said another operation save minister this time. I don't know how much she believed what I said, she did not say anything after seeing all these gifts.

I said I will go meet Kirit and come. I called Kirit and he said he will be at the factory. I told him I am coming to meet him. took the car and went over. We spoke for some time and I asked him about Nishitha and his relations. He said both their parents had a talk and they should fix a date in the near future. I asked him about his living plans after the marriage. He said they have taken the side flat and combining them and they would be staying in the new flat. I thought if we go to live in our new house, I wanted him to have Sunitha's house. Now it is not required, she might give the house for rent. Let her decide to shift there first. I asked him how it is going with Mahira? He said he hardly meets her. He asked about Sunitha, I said we just spent an entire week together. He asked what were you doing? I said I was called to Delhi, I took her with me and we ran an operation there. He asked what was the operation. Did you not see in the papers our photos were clicked with the minister? He said it was you with the minister? They have not shown our faces clearly, they want to make it an issue but they did not get any traction and left the matter. It was a reverse sting. We have spoiled their sting operation. We got an order and an advance for our efforts. I also got bonds and another house beside our office building. I think this change of scenery for me is showing me good results. If anyone wants their share back they can have it. I thought if he wants he can have it back, I don't want them losing any money. If they want to continue, they will be part of our profits and losses. He said he had confidence in me and wants to continue being partners. Others also have confidence in you. So, no one wants to have their share back.

I asked where is Krishna I have seen him around? Kirit said I had sent him for delivery and collect the cheque. I said when he comes back tell him to speak with me.

I said bye to him and went over to Sunitha's flat. I took her to dinner and later left her at her flat and went home.

The next day I went to the office and gave the details of the new project to Rajesh and went to look at the new house. It was fully furnished and called Sahithi to come and look at the house. Then went over to Loveleen's house. I went inside and sat on the sofa. Loveleen came over with Dhruv. I picked him and played with him. She asked what happened in Delhi. I told her everything that happened, it took me more than one hour for all this. I said it seems your father wants me to be close to you, that's why he has given me the next bungalow. She said I have asked him to do that. After the riots I want you to be close to me. Now you will be in the next house.

I said I wanted to ask about Guru, but did not get time to ask. What happened to him? She said it was just a show for the press. He was back to his business. After he was shown with me and my father, his old contacts have taken him back. I asked what about your divorce? She said my father advised me to give some time before applying for a divorce. This way there won't be any scandal.

I thought she had a point there. Why should I care about her divorce? I am not going to marry her. Why should I care? It is because I have done all this for her freedom, I want to see her free from that Guru.

Sahithi

Suddenly Kumar offered to shift to Beachfront house. It is beside his office. He wanted to shift there, but I feel little discomfort shifting there. I feel secure here in my own house. I feel a little insecure to shift to his house. Am I insecure with him getting all this wealth? The office and this new house he got now, am I jealous of him getting all this? Then why am I feeling insecure about going to a new house? What kids will do? Do we need to shift their school? How are we going to manage all this? Can we put our children in a better school than this? I heard there is a very good school near the station where high-class people from around here are studying. Can we offer to put them there? I have to discuss all this with Kumar.

Mahira

As suggested by Kumar I asked for a meeting with the vice president of marketing of the courier company. He gave me time and I explained to him what Kumar has asked me to get the project. He told me to get the details of how we are going to proceed with the computerization of their branches. He has been away for the last week in Delhi. What was he doing there? The only thing I came to know is that he went to meet Loveleen's father. Why he was

called one day after she gave birth to a boy? What is the connection between this and his visit? Was her father asking him to look after her and the kid? There were rumours about him getting the house between our office and Loveleen's house. Was he going to come and live here? Will he be living next door to Loveleen's? I also should ask for a room here for myself. I can also live independent. You have to see Kumar's room here. It contains everything one needs to live on yourself. It's a self-contained room with all the things required. It has a small kitchen, bathroom, cupboards for his clothes, a sofa for sleeping. What else he needs. If has to go to a meeting he can change there and can go.

If I have a room like that I can come and live myself here.

I have to go talk to him about the idea of providing services to the courier company.

Kumar

Mahira came to my room and knocked on the door. I called her in and asked what is going on the marketing front? She said she spoke to the VP Marketing and he wanted to know how we can help them in computerization. I asked what did you reply? She said I told him I will bring our MD. I said ok when shall we go? She said I will take time and inform you. She called the VP and asked for a meeting. She told me he is asking to come over. I said let us go. We took the car and went over to their office. We parked outside the office and we went to the second floor where their offices are located. She went in and spoke to his secretary and she went inside and came out and said he asked us to sit in the conference room. We went and sat in the conference room. A butler came and put some water in front of us. when he asked something to drink for her she said tea, he went away to get us tea. He brought and placed two cups of tea in front of us went away. After 10 minutes two men came and sat down. She introduced them as President of the company Mr. Lal and vice president marketing Mr. Gopal Krishna. Mr. Lal is fair, little fat and around 5feet 8 inches in height. He was wearing a suit. Mr. Gopal Krishna is a little thin and about average height. She introduced me as Kumar owner of the software company. He asked me how long was I running the software company. I said around 6 months. He asked what I was doing previous to that. I said I run a factory. He said you do not have much experience. I said I have enough experience to run a software company. He asked what projects you have? I said we are doing a hospital project and recently we got a government project. He was surprised how could you get a government project? Mahira told him he has some political connections. He asked how can you help us with computerization? I have two

options for you. One is we send our men to each of his branches with the software which we will install and they can feed the data and send back the data through floppies through couriers, which will not be difficult for them. The second way is we install the systems here with software and send them through the courier and we send our men to their branches for training. He said both the ways seem similar. I said the first method the branches should have systems present. The second method you can send our men with the courier and they will install, train and return. You can decide on whichever method or can use both methods as per the situation. He asked What happens when we use our man to do what have you suggested? You can do it but what is the next step for you? I asked what have you planned for the future? He asked what is the future course of action? I said I have already planned that, but if you are not interested in the first part, what is the use of me telling about the next part of the computerization. How are you going to combine the data coming from multiple sources? Can we do this forever? What is the future technology holds for you? What does your international company expect from you? How are you going to fulfil their needs? We don't have the technology they have in the US. they have the internet there, if not tomorrow it will come to India in the near future. How are you going to meet the requirements of the parent company? Think about the future and decide.

They both looked at each other and Mr. Gopal said they need to discuss and will come back. I gave them my card. He looked at the address on the card and asked what is this area? I said our office is on the beachside, you should come and visit us once. I think we have a housewarming ceremony coming up you should come. He asked house warming? I said we got the next house to our office, we will be shifting there. He asked how did you get them. I said It was a gift to us. Mahira interjected I told you he has political connections.

Mr. Gopal said to Mahira you come and meet me tomorrow. I got up and said thanks for your time and came out. One girl was standing outside. She must be VP's secretary, she is short round and dusky. She asked me can you give me your number sir. I gave her my card. We came down took our car back to the office. Sahithi must have come, I went to the new house and she was looking at the house. I asked her did you decide to shift here or want to stay back at your house? She said I am looking at the house, what changes we need to make if we decide to shift here. I said if Kirit is going to get married I will ask them to get married here before we shift here. Seeing Nishitha coming she asked is their marriage fixed? I said I don't know I was told they are in consultations with each other.

Sahithi asked Nishitha shall we shift here? Nishitha said it is a big house you should shift here, I will miss my daily transport. Sahithi said don't worry about that I will arrange some transport for you.

I asked Nishitha have you finished noting down the requirements. She said there is not much we can do. We try to spruce up the house a little. We are planning for something on the outside. For children to play and sitting arrangements for beachside, things like that. I said also to plan for arranging parties. We want our parties to outdo Loveleen's. She said she will look into that also. I said if your work is completed let us go, else I will go to my office for some time. She said we are expecting some workers, you can go to your office.

I went to the developer's room and spoke to Rajesh. I asked him does he wants to go to Delhi for the collection of information on the order. He said he wants to go. I said I will make arrangements for the ticket and ask them to book a hotel room for him. Before going to Delhi please hand over the hospital project file to me.

I went to Pauleen asked her to inform the directors about a board meeting on Saturday at 11 am for appointing Sunitha as Operations Director. She said she will inform all. I went back to the room and sat down on my chair. What else I have to look after? We need two people for the courier company if they give us the project. This hospital project does not seem to be going forward, that is the reason I decided to send Rajesh to Delhi and asked him to hand over the project file to me. I should take over things, I should not depend on others to take initiative and do the work. I switched on the tv and started watching the news. There is news about the minister that has been targeted. There were some allegations about him were made in the press, which he refuted vehemently and asked them to show some proof. It seems they disappeared the lady who he was with and they were alleging that he had killed her and asking him to bring her out into the public. He was saying when there is no lady who he can bring out. He had called for a press conference and he said he did not have any affairs and he was with a firm discussing about some business, which he can't reveal at this juncture as it would affect the security of the state. When they stormed his meeting was a security lapse and they can reveal the photos they have taken during the meeting. Which will only show that his version of the events was correct. They were not revealing the photos because it does not fit with their version of the events. The opponents to their party left without obtaining any upper hand after the meeting. I thought I had done the things in the correct way to help them.

Rajesh came with the Hospital project file. I took the file and thanked him and told him to be ready to go to Delhi. He went away.

I looked at the file, there is very little in the file in relation to the project. It seems they did not know how to proceed with the development of the software.

I decided I have to go to the hospital to collect the information. I noted down the phone no of the contact person from the file and called him. I asked for a meeting with him. He said come over tomorrow around 11 am. I said I will be there and cut the call. I asked Pauleen to get Rajesh a ticket for Delhi by train. She said she will get a travel agent to book the ticket.

Sahithi had come to the reception and rang me to come. I took the keys and went down to pick them.

Chapter 8

I dropped Sahithi and Nishitha and went directly to the hospital. I sent my card to the hospital administrator through his peon. He called me after five minutes. There was a girl present in his office. He introduced her as Nandini, she is in training with them. She had done her Hospital Administration from the USA and she joined them as a trainee. I said glad to meet you and asked him about our developers visiting them. He said to coordinate with Nandini, she will provide all the necessary details. Nandini said come with me and took me to her cabin. We sat down and she said they have been here just twice. They just looked around and went away. I said I thought so, now I am taking over the project. I gave her my card. She asked you are the MD and you are taking over the project? I said I am sending Rajesh to Delhi on another project. I will put the others on another project if it goes through. I want this project to finish as soon as possible. She asked how come you have come yourself? I said we just started the company, we don't have a large staff. It is difficult to get the developers nowadays as this industry is in infancy and experienced developers are not easy to come by. She asked how did you get into this industry then? I said it was something of a fluke. I was asked by a software firm owner to remove errors in the software, they could not find the bugs. I have done that for him and he gave me a software to run the factory where I have been working. Then I got a computer for myself and started to work on software for finding trends for a political party. They have won the elections and I started the software firm. We got money from multiple sources. Our office space was provided by the party winning the elections. And others have given us advances to run their trends in the upcoming elections. We got some partners who have put up the capital. In all this, my share is the largest. Can you show me the departments that need computerization? She said come on and we went and visited the departments where they are collecting cash and giving receipts. We went to the department where bills are generated, reports are prepared and patients are issued medicines and where patients are discharged. I noted each department contribution to the hospital and collected some sample receipts and reports. I said if you want to visit our office you are welcome, you can come any time.

I took leave of her and came to the parking. I took a fag from my pocket stood there smoking. I am thinking are the developers dependable? Do they need constant supervision to make them work? It seems so. I have to keep pressuring them to work. Let me see how they will work under me. Finishing the fag, I threw it on the ground and snubbed it with my shoe. I turned to the car to open the door, Nandini came running and said I thought you already left. I said I am

about to go. I took permission from my boss to go to your office and monitor the development. Can you take me with you? I said come sit. I started the car and drove. I thought I would go to Sunitha first then to the office. Now I have changed my plans and driven to the office.

I stopped at the office parking lot and asked her to come with me. I took her to our new house and showed her the house. I asked her how is this house, we are going to shift here. She asked is this your new house? I said yes. She looked at the house and went to the sea side and said wow what a house and you are going to live here! Then I took her to Loveleen's house and the servant went and called Loveleen. She came out with Dhruv. I introduced Loveleen as our major investor and she runs an interior decorating firm, Nandini as she is from the hospital she had come to give support for the development of the software. Nandini took Dhruv into her hands and asked how many months? I replied he is not even one month. She made faces at him and gave him back to Loveleen. I said come to Nandini, we went to our office. I introduced her to Pauleen and then took her to the developer's cabin. I introduced each other and said to them she came over to help in the development. Rajesh came over from the outside and asked her surprisingly what are you doing here. I told him she came over to help in the development. I told her to come with me and took her to Mahira's cabin. She is on phone with someone, seeing me said into the phone, I will call later and cut the call. I introduced each other and said to Mahira she came over to help in the development. I took her to another room and told her this would be her room. You can check the progress from here. She said wow my own room. I said you have all the requirements here. You can use the computer and all the facilities. Come I will show you my room and took her to my room. Seeing the room, she asked do you live here? I said no why? I thought you live here, it is decorated for living, everything you need is here. She looked over the room and toilet. She opened the cupboards and closed, she asked where do you stay? I said at Vikhroli. She asked with whom? I said with my wife and kids. She said you are married and you have kids also. This room seems like a bachelor room. If you don't go home you can stay here for the night. I said that is the idea of setting up the room. Do you want to have tea? She said yes. I fixed two cups of tea and gave her one took mine to the table and sat down. She asked how much you spend for setting up this office. I don't know exactly how much we have spent. I have not received the bills yet, by the financial year-end we will know.

She asked you have not paid for all this? I said I have for the computers and equipment. Interior decoration and all this showing the room is done by Loveleen's firm. So, whatever their bill I will add to her capital share.

She asked you spend all this on this building is it your own building? I said it is on my name only and the next building also, where we are planning to shift. She asked is it given by your family? I said no, it is my own earnings. She asked how long it took you to earn all this? I said around one year. She said if you can earn all this in a year, whatever you are doing must be good. What were you doing before you started this? I said I was a manager in a factory. What were your earnings then? I would call it pittance. We were lucky to succeed in whatever we were doing. The credit should go to Loveleen. I started to do her a favour and ended up earning all this. She shook her head as if she could not believe all this. You have to tell me from the beginning, all this I could not understand anything. I started with my studying in intermediate in Vijayawada, how I fell in love with Sneha and how I eloped with her and how much hardships we had to bear. How she went away and I married Sahithi and Sneha returned back with twins. Then How we started hotel at Bombay central and she died in a fire accident. How we sold off the hotel and shared the proceeds. Then how we thought the accident is murder and investigated and found the truth. Then how I met Loveleen and how she asked for my help with her husband, how we planned to get her divorce and how we ended up making the minister resign. How in the elections we have helped them win and how we got all this as a gift for the hard work we put up? She said so you got all this for helping to win the elections. I said so you can say software has lot to do with all this.

I did not say for what I got the house now, because I did not know myself.

She said you are from Vijayawada and Sneha also. You studied degree in Hyderabad and later came over to Bombay. Worked in a factory married a Maharashtrian. You met a Punjabi girl and you helped her and got all this. I said you can say that. So, you got all this because of Loveleen.

We sat down and made notes on how to proceed with the software. I said I am putting this on the server so you can access it from your computer. If you make the changes save them back to the server. I will start with preparing the data tables.

I left Nandini in her room and went out to the car. I took the car and went to Sunitha's flat. I told her we are having a board meeting on Saturday and I want her to be appointed as Operations Director. We spent some time and I said I have some work and went to the factory. Spoke to Kirit about Sunitha's appointment and asked him about his vote for that. I asked where is Krishna. He said he is on the floor. I said call him up, I want to speak with him. He called the shop floor and asked to send Krishna up. He came after five minutes. I asked

him about their actions during riots. I was told he had participated in one of the riots. I wanted to know the details of his actions.

I asked him why did he participate in the riots with the others. Did the Shakha Pramukh did not warn them not to do rioting? He said they did not have any intention of doing any rioting. But they were inciting violence and had come to our houses trying to scare us. We tried to beat them back. During that, they had injured our Aunt. So, we went behind them. One fellow has the chicken shop beside the bakery, he was their leader and he was telling them to hit us with bats and stumps. So, we destroyed his chicken shop. We had a run-in with him previously. He had used one of the girls coming to the typing institute and he left her. We did not touch the type institute. We had done minimal damage to scare them away. When we destroyed the shop, they ran away. They did not return back again. I think that act has saved us from further attacks. I said you have done remarkably well. I had spoken with Shakha Pramukh and he was telling you people have gone on a rampage, I could not believe it and wanted to confirm. I will speak with him and clarify this. Overall you have done a good job in the Vakola area. I said to Kirit see you on Saturday and left the factory. I went home and spend some time with the kids and left for the office.

I went to my room and started working on the data tables. I worked for an hour on the masters and went down to the development area asked them to prepare the screens for the master.

I went over to Nandini's room, knocked and opened the door. She was going through the documentation we prepared and she is making some corrections. I sat with her and we discussed the changes she was making. We worked together for one hour. I said I will come back and went out for fag. On the way, I knocked on Mahira door and looked inside. She said she is coming. I went down and waited for Mahira to come.

5th June 1993. The day of the board meeting.

Kumar

We started with the first order of business of inducting Sunitha as Operations Manager. Others have voted yes but Sahithi was asking questions why she should be operations directors when she and Nishitha were just directors. I said if they decide to leave their jobs and join our company full time then I can give them some post. Finally, they have agreed to my proposition to induct her. As

we are about to take the next point, we got a call from the reception that some people have come. I thought someone came to meet me, I said then send them. I opened the door to the room and there were the same press people who have come to the minister's house. I looked back all the partners were standing behind me. I looked around the office. The developers have come out of their cabin and staring at the press. Pauleen stood at her desk. The watchman was standing at the door. I said calmly to the press what can I do for you. They all started asking questions. I said calmly can any one person speak. One person came forward and asked is it true that the minister called you for giving a software order? I said yes, we have gone to Delhi for a software order. He asked then where is the order. I said as he mentioned the details of the software order can't be divulged. He said then how can we be sure that whatever you are saying is true.

He is thinking he is putting me in a fix, now I am going to put him in a fix. I said if you want to see the order you have to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Then we can show you the order. He said ok I will sign the agreement on these people behalf. I said I will call our lawyer. Loveleen, call our lawyer. By the time he arrives, I will tell you after you see the order if you disclose the contents to anyone you will be liable to pay one lakh as compensation and you are liable to a jail term to be decided by the court. If any matter is leaked by anyone you will be responsible for that. Before signing that you remember that. Until the lawyer arrived I eat his brain with the threats. The lawyer arrived after forty-five minutes. I explained to the lawyer what we need for him to sign for disclosing the order. He asked can I get a typewriter. I said you can use the computer on Pauleen's table and you can print it out in our server room. He prepared the agreement and printed it and brought it to him. I said once more I am warning you if the contents of the agreement come out you will be responsible, think once again, and gave the papers to him. He looked at the agreement and read the conditions and said we believe you had only gone for the software order. When one of the other members chided him, he told them to sign the agreement and go and see the order. With these words, he went out of the office. Looking at each other they all followed him.

We went back to our chairs and sat down. Sahithi is asked what is this drama? I told her how do you think we got the next-door house as a gift. That is the reverse sting operation we pulled for the minister. These people want to prove the minister wrong and came over here to show him as a liar. So, we had to pull a fast one on them. We could easily disclose the contents of the order, but we will not get any traction in this matter. By asking him to sign the NDA I foiled

their bid to get the information of the order. Now they failed for what they have come for. Even if he signs the NDA and sees the order he could not say the order does not contain anything of value. So, we are safe either way.

Sahithi asked is this what you were doing in Delhi for them? For doing this they are giving you all this showing the office. I said see it is not that, to safeguard their positions they have to do whatever in their power.

I saw Nandini standing behind, she must have come in during the melee with the press. I said Nandini come and sit. Said to all hey guys this is Nandini she is working with the hospital we are doing a project for. She has done Hospital Administration from America. Now she is working as a trainee with the hospital. She said hi to you all. I said now, where are we? Our second point in our agenda is shall we use the house between our office and Loveleen's house as a house or shall we reserve it for future office use. Nishitha said we are already working on the building for residential use. Sahithi said I have already decided to shift here. I made plans for children's school also. Loveleen said this office space is sufficient for another five years at least. So, all of you agree we can use it for residential purposes. Everyone said aye.

I said the next point in the agenda is about marketing. Mahira what is your intake on this point? She said our target group for computerization is not aware of the advantages of using computers. That might be the reason we are not getting any orders. I looked around and anyone has any pointers on this. No one spoke. Nandini asked can I speak? I said you can certainly speak. She said the point mentioned by Mahira is not seemed to be valid. I think their salespersons are showing the wrong picture or targeting the wrong clientele. You should approach your clients before starting of the financial year. Then they would have budgeted for the expenses. Now if you approach after three months they would not know under which head of the budget they can show the expense. So, we have to paint a picture of the future, how this will affect the future operations. They have to understand that this computerization had to be put under capital expenses. Then they can see what capital budget is provided and can move things around. I asked her so you think the main problem in the sales approach is the customers budget allocation? Nandini replied I feel it is one of the problems making customers hesitate. I looked at Mahira for an answer. Mahira said I agree it is also one of the points, it would be a problem with bigger companies, where they have to get approvals from the board and things like that. But medium sized organizations or family run organizations do not run like that. You take the example of your factory, looking at Kirit how did you consider computerization? I said we had to do it because Mr. Kathuria has given the

software free for me so I can give him some time for debugging his software. So, you can also say we should give it free to them so they will get hooked to our software? Mahira said we can do it that way. I said then we need to have a product, which can be given to customers on a trial basis. If they are satisfied they need to purchase the software or else they can't use it after the expiry of the trial period. Mahira said then we can give on trial the software you prepared for the factory. I said it is you who have to sell the software. Can you do it that way? How many trial giveaways can you turn into sales? She said I don't know I have to speak with my team. I said you do that. I asked Nandini what is your take on this point of trial software? Nandini said you can turn this hospital software into a product. My father and my uncle are planning to build a hospital in Hyderabad. My cousin brother is a surgeon. It is still in the planning stage and gathering finances. I have done my hospital management course for that purpose only. I wanted to run our hospital. That is the reason I am working as a trainee. So, when we complete the hospital we would like to have a trial software rather I would like to purchase the software rather than trial. I said on another point if you need finances for your hospital project, you can tell me, we have sources who want to invest in such projects. She said she will speak with her father regarding the finances.

I asked anyone had any other points to take up?

Sahithi asked how can you get investors for such a project? I said from our contacts we can accumulate investors. I know many people want to convert their black money into white. They may invest their black money with white money in such a project. She asked can you certainly get such people? I said I am sure from our contacts we can do that.

Nishitha asked are you ready to pay off the bills for Interior decorating? I said if they raise the bills and ask for settling them I can pay off. Or the firm can ask for the bills to be turned into capital shares. I looked at Loveleen, she nodded her head. It is our understanding her father has asked her to extend all the cooperation to our firm and not to spare any expenses in setting up of our firm. We are also flush with funds. It is her firm as much as mine. I have treated all the partners as the same. I gave all of them the same equal voting rights.

Sahithi asked are you sure you can pay off the bills and have running capital. I said I am sure and we don't have any problems with liquid cash at the moment. I can induct more money into the business. I can get a loan from the bank. We can do a lot of things. I am thinking about returning the cash I borrowed belonging to the children in the form of bonds I am holding. I went to my office

and brought bonds worth rupees five lakhs and gave it to Sahithi. It is the amount I am returning to the kids' future. The interest on these you can use for children's studies. It is on a spur of the moment decision and I did not regret doing it. I don't want to use for personal gain, Sneha's maternal inheritance. She wanted the children to have it and they will have it. No one can take it back from them. If I put that on the business, it will become the firm property on my share and it may be lost in due course. I don't want the children to suffer due to my mismanagement. I asked Kirit, if he wants to reduce his share on the firm, he can do so. None have approached me to reduce their share. It means they have confidence on the firm doing well. They all have invested with their eyes wide open. If their money is lost, they are responsible for their losses. I know anything can happen in the future. There is no guarantee for human life.

I looked around the people sitting and none has anything to say. I said shall we adjourn the meeting. Everyone said aye.

I told Pauleen to prepare the minutes of the meeting and pass them to everyone.

I said to them shall we go and see the house, many of you have not seen it.

We went to the new house and those who have not visited it previously were looking through it. I said to maintain the house we need servants. I will engage the cleaners from our office for the house also. I stood at the back exit and waited for them to come. At last, everyone came and I opened the door to the beachside. There I have arranged a party for the partners. I said someone call others from the office.

Sahithi

I have committed to shifting house otherwise he would have transferred the house to the firm. Now we have to shift the house from Vikhroli. We were together for nearly seven years there. But seeing the house I could not let go of it. How would it be to live in a house like this? Children can have their own rooms. Servant quarters can be given to Chitti. I can have my own room. Kumar can have his own room, reading room, library. He has a lot of books which I keep in boxes. He also has them at his parent's place, he lends books to his mother. With all these books he can have a library. He has his computer books. I think I should decorate one big room for his library cum study room. We also need to connect the networking to his room and also we need to connect the intercom to this house. I have to speak with networking people on this.

Nandini

I don't know why I am getting involved in their business. I went there to see how they are developing the software for the purpose of learning. As my father and uncle were about to start the hospital project I wanted to learn whatever possible about hospitals. That is the reason I joined as a trainee instead of helping them in the building process. Now I know the software would be the future of the world. There were fears of it will replace the human workforce. But I always felt computerization or robotics can't replace humans. The only thing it might happen is unintelligent working force might be replaced by an intelligent workforce who might use robotics or computers. It means one type of people will replace another type of people. The Labour force will have something to do or other. They will shift from one work to another. They will always find work. They have to upgrade their skills. It is for their own good. If they upgrade their skills, their earning capacity will increase. Which in turn will upgrade their lifestyles. Their children will have better educational opportunities. Governments can't always help them. They have to help themselves.

Kumar was talking about giving financial support for the hospital project. Do we need financial support? Can he really get us that support? From the outset, his firm looks small with a small staff. There is hardly anyone working here, he says they just started. I think the hospital project is his first project. His developers hardly have knowledge about development. It can be clearly seen from the fact he had himself had to jump-start the project. From the board meeting, it is clear his marketing director had no idea how to sell the software. The person who has no idea how his company is working, can he provide financial support. From his talks, it is clear he got his financials from those sources. That is the reason for his confidence. What stories he told about how he got these houses. Can it be possible to amass such wealth in such a short time? If what he says is true then he can provide financial support. I have to see what kind of financial support my father needs. The problem with bringing outsiders into the project would be they will interfere in the day to day working of the hospital, then it will become difficult to run the hospital. In the long run, it will be upon me to look after the hospital as a hospital administrator. I have to think about that also. First, I will speak with my father about his requirements. Then accordingly I will speak with Kumar.

Mahira

If what went in the board meeting is true, then I am not selling the software in the correct way. That new girl has the tenacity to tell me how to sell. What experience she has in sales or marketing. Kumar said she has studied hospital management. I have been in sales for the last 10 years and she is giving pointers. Whatever, Kumar has shown me a new method of follow up. Trial packs is the new method of software selling. It is like giving free cigarettes make them addicted and they will buy themselves and we can borrow from them. I think I have to start selling instead of sitting in the office coordinating with the salesman. I should get my legs muddy if I have to get any results. I understand why Kumar said with minimal investment is also he ready to take us as partners. He knows I have to do marketing to safeguard my interests in the company. If I don't sell I will not get anything back as profit. He knows how he can earn without the company. The company could be a front for Kumar. Without using the company resources, he has got these houses and he has returned five lakhs in bonds to Sahithi for the children's cash he had used for the company. If he had returned five lakhs means how much he must have earned when he went on the trip to Delhi. On a one-week trip, he got those returns but he had to face the press when they attacked him here. I think he has managed them brilliantly. They came, they attacked, they went back with the tail between their legs.

Overall, he is not dependent on the software firm, we are, especially me. I don't have any other source of income. Then I had to depend on my father or siblings. They all have permanent jobs. I am the lone wolf in the house who does not have any permanent job. Shall I look for a permanent job? My nature is such that I used to think marketing is my forte. Now I have reservations about that. If I fail in this job, I better look for another job like my sister. I heard he offered Kirit to take back his investment if he does not have confidence in Kumar's work. Kirit said he is ready to give anyone back their investment. Can that mean Kumar has confidence in his work? Or he wants to buy us out before he starts earning or could it mean he fears that the company won't last long, and he wants to return the money before he loses it? What could be the reason for offering to return the invested money? From the confidence he is showing and the way he returned five lakhs to Sahithi of children's money, it seems he wants us to withdraw the money before the earning starts. He does not want us to give our share of the profits. If we withdraw now we can't ask him for a share of the profits and I will be getting only salary and if don't bring sales, I myself would resign the job and leave the company. Is it his idea of forcing us out of the company? Let me see, I will not ask him to return the money. Over that he is offering Nandini investment in their hospital project. How much he has with him to offer her investments. When he was working with the factory, he was

counting each rupee he is spending. I have not seen a miser like him then. After Sneha went away he became just opposite, he started spending the money like water. I have seen two phases of him during the few years I have known him. Now I am seeing the third phase possibly. He is so extravagant, he is giving parties, he is going to live in this bungalow. His office is itself another bungalow. These kinds of houses can only be offered by the likes of Tata's or Birla's. Is he rising to their level? How is it possible for a person to raise in such a short time? What has he done to raise to such a level? Can I follow in his footsteps? Isn't it his way of telling us to continue with the company, you can raise with me to those levels? Is he willing to share it all with us? I think he wants to share with us. He offered this house to the company first before taking it as his house. Sahithi and Nishitha have objected to his offering for the company. Maybe they thought the company may not need this house for the operations. What can we do with this house, when we have not filled the office space fully. Our occupation of the office space is less than fifty per cent. He even gave Nandini an office room just like that. If I ask he would give me a room to live here. What would I do with an extra room? After coming back from Hyderabad, I and Kirit were not together. Is Nishitha has something to do with that? What is Kumar's and Loveleen's story? They act as if they are good friends. He acts as her protector. I heard during the riots he had taken her to his parent's house. Now he is telling he is shifting here to be close to her. How much close they are? What Sahithi is doing in between? Why she is not resisting him coming here, instead she is talking as if it is her idea to shift here. When he offered the house to the company, she who resisted and asked they shift here. She must be redecorating it for her convenience. She must have thought of each room in the house and its usage. If she knowingly shifts here it is her funeral.

Chapter 9

1st July 1993.

Kumar

Today we are performing a house warming ceremony at the new house. I convinced Sahithi not to rent her house, we can use it as a guest house. I don't want the house to be rented, not yet.

We have called our parents, relatives and friends for the ceremony. In the morning we have traditional ceremonies. In the next day evening, we have planned for a party, where we want to invite our business guests.

In the morning we had a traditional puja for entering the house. Then we had Satyanarayana Vratha Puja which is traditionally performed at the time of Entering a new house in our Andhra Pradesh. After that lunch is served to the guests. Due to this puja, we can't serve non-veg in the house, so we had to plan the party for the next day. For the house warming ceremony including our parent's, many relatives have attended. None of them could attend my marriages and this is the occasion they could come to Bombay for any function. Another thing they have heard of the bungalow we are going to live in and the office next door and they wanted to see with their eyes to believe we are going to live in such a house. None of them had seen such a house except maybe in the movies.

It was a grand affair just for the ceremony. We had called priests from the Matunga temple for the puja. Everything was performed as per the rituals.

After the initial puja breakfast is served to the guests. After breakfast, Satyanarayana Puja started. For this another priest came over, he was brought from Andhra, he performed the puja and then read the story of the vrath and its prominence. After completion of the puja, prasadam is distributed. Every one of guests are asked to take the blessings from God, thus completed the puja. After the puja, lunch is served. Every one of the guests had lunch and those who have attended from the city have dispersed. Those who have come from outside the city wanted to see our office. I asked someone to take them to see the office.

All the relatives have gathered around and started chatting. They were talking among themselves about my success. One aunty is heard telling them he has achieved so much in such a short time. Someone telling it must be his wife's money. Someone else is telling must be black money, things like that. Some are

jealous of seeing the house and office. Some are wondering how I could have accumulated so much. Some are talking as if everything is brought with loans. Some are talking as if it was company money. My cousins were asking how I have earned all this. I said through software development. Another cousin who is younger than me asked is it possible to earn so much through software development. I said I don't know about the possibilities, the software clicked and brought quick results. Also, our investors have invested in the software knowing its advantages. The industry is in its infancy and this is the correct time to start off.

Another cousin sister asked did you buy these bungalows? You could have offices at another location at much cheaper prices or better suited to offices. I said I got these for the house purpose only, I used them for office purposes. We have a business party tomorrow you stay back and attend the party. My cousins have agreed to attend the party. In the evening I took my uncles to the office and arranged for them a party as they will be going back to their home. Some caught the night train and went over. Some stayed behind and we provided guest rooms for them. Some have gone to my father's house. After everyone went over we had our party back of the office on the beachside. After we had two pegs my cousin brother asked how did you really earn all this. I said I wanted to help a friend ended up in the political drama, that is when I got this bungalow. Another brother asked what you really did, you have to tell us, we have the whole night in front of us. I think you all have met Loveleen, our neighbour on the other side. One brother said the Punjabi lady? I said yes. She hit me with her car when I was returning from a client. I was not hurt badly, but she gave me her card and told me to come and meet her. I went to her the next day. I showed her I did not get hurt and escaped with little scratches on my hand. She offered to help Sahithi with a problem in her office and offered her a job with her firm. I went to Delhi with Loveleen to look for a branch office she wanted to open there. I went with her because I thought if she goes to Delhi total control of the firm will be passed on to Sahithi, which Sahithi wanted. We went there we looked around for office space, then she went nuts thinking about her past, which she told me at the hotel. She had a husband who was misbehaving with her and her father called him back to Delhi from Bombay. then she wanted a divorce and her father was adamant that it will affect his political career and would not let her get it. Now I went and looked at her husband and planned to discredit him. We came back and waited for the correct person to fall in our lap. It has happened that I had rescued a girl from some gang members and she helped us in discrediting her husband. This is the gift for doing that sting operation indicating our office building. He asked just for

discrediting her husband. I said not that only it had helped them win the state elections. For that, I got this. He asked then for what you have got the other building. I followed up on that with them and we started this software firm. It is all complicated. He said I know how much you suffered when Sneha disappeared from the sister's marriage. When did you marry Sahithi? I said after her disappearance I have become someone who does not care about anything. I was sitting at home not having proper food and not going to the factory where I used to work. Then my boss sent Sahithi to take care of me. I knew her for some time like an acquaintance. Like hi, hello, bye type. Then she took me to her house and gave me a room and slowly I became my former self and started to attend the factory. When I heard Sneha has two kids, I thought she had remarried and I married Sahithi. When she heard about our marriage she returned and they both used to live together. In the meantime, we started a hotel and I used to look after the factory and my boss used to look after the hotel. To help at our hotel I had sent Sneha there and she had a fire accident and died. One fine day I was asked help with some software and I helped him and I got connected to this software and started this software firm. My younger brother asked did you get any projects? I said we have got a hospital project we are doing now. You have met Nandini, she is helping me in that project from the hospital side. She checks what we have developed and reports errors. I heard her speaking with your mother in Telugu, is she from Andhra. I said I know she is from Andhra, but I did not ask from where? We normally speak in English and keep professional relations only. We finished the drinks and food and I told them to sleep in the office only, why to go in front of our elders.

The Next day I got up and woke them and we all went to the house. Someone asked where were you last night. I said we have slept in the office, we thought there is no space for sleeping here. We had our coffee and went over to the office building. I had my bath and changed there in my room. I prepared breakfast in my room, after breakfast I started checking the reports prepared by Nandini.

I worked for two hours then Mahira knocked on the door. I said her to come in. She came over and sat down. I asked her about the guests she invited for the evening party. Had she invited the courier management? She said she went and invited them personally. I asked about any other potential clients she invited. We talked about the arrangements for the party and she went away.

I went to Loveleen's house. I went in and sat down on the sofa. A servant brought a cup of tea and gave it to me. I sipped and put down the cup. After ten minutes Loveleen came with Dhruv. She gave him to me and sat down. I said my

cousins want to meet you, shall I call them? She said why not. I rang up home and asked Sahithi to send my cousins to Loveleen's house. They came after five minutes. I introduced each one of them to Loveleen. After introductions she said you wanted to meet me, Kumar was telling. Elder cousin said we wanted to meet you, as you seem to have so much influence on him. We think because of you only he could take these decisions. We always told him, why are you still working in the factory? She said what is wrong working at the factory? he was working as a manager there. The elder one said we thought he was working in the factory in some lower category. We met him last at his sister's wedding. He was not like this then. Over that his wife missed from the wedding hall. We all thought she has left him because he was working in a factory and she did not like him working there. That is the reason we did not try to help him much. We only came to know what happened only recently. Then we understand his mental status. We know he eloped with her and married her in Hyderabad. At that time, we were not staying there, due to my father's postings we were moving around. We did not follow his story properly. We only heard gossips. Then when we heard his story yesterday, we came to know you had a great influence on him. Now we are of the opinion that everybody should have an influencer like you. Looking at the boy in her hand my younger cousin asked boy or girl? She said boy his name is Dhruv. He picked him and said how many months? She said two months. Each one picked him looked at him passed to the next one and then passed him to Loveleen.

They got up took her leave came out and I followed them. After coming out the younger cousin said he seems to have your likeness. I said how is that possible. He is a Punjabi. Might be during his formative years I was with her the whole time that could be the reason. Some elders say who you look at will look like.

I told them not to forget the party in the evening, there will be many hotshot businessmen. Elder cousin asked how you know them? I said some are my contacts, some are our marketing manager's contacts, some are Sahithi and Loveleen's contact. You know they both work in the interior decoration firm. Then some are through friend's and their friends. And you people have not met Sunitha our new operations director. She could not attend the puja due to some problem. She will be at today's party. You have also not met Mahira our marketing director, she is a Muslim that's why she did not attend the puja. Then Kirit is one of the directors. You have met Nishitha another director. My younger cousin said you made all of them directors. I said they are my investors and they all have invested in the company, I gave them directorship so they will be involved in the decisions of the company. Last month only we had a board

meeting. Let us go to the office and I took them to the office. Showed them the arrangements made for future expansion. We don't have many developers now, we will expand as per the projects we are getting.

I took them to Nandini's room, I knocked and entered. I introduced my cousins and told Nandini they have some questions for you and told them to shoot your questions. They were asking her questions about where she is from, why she choose hospital management, what she will do once she finishes training, will she go back to Hyderabad or will stay and work here, things like that. From their question and answers, I understood she is from Guntur and they shifted to Hyderabad in 1986 and her father is a businessman and her cousin is a heart surgeon. The remaining things are known to me.

After their interview, I took them to Mahira's room and introduced them. I left them there and said after their interview they come to my room and went outside for my fag.

I finished my fag and returned to my room, they must still be in Mahira's room. I went and made myself a cup of tea and sat down sipping tea.

The cousins came after two hours. Elder cousin asked did you really rescued Mahira and Kirit from the cheating gang. I said I helped them get out of a tricky situation. That is not much Kirit was kidnapped again in Bombay on the way to the factory. I had to search for him all over the suburbs. I stopped at the place of kidnapping and chatted with a panwala and got the details of the gang. I informed the police and they investigated and by the time we reached their hideout they have left the place and I could just save Kirit. Still, the gang are not traced.

Rajesh returned from Delhi. I asked what he did in Delhi. He said he had completed the project and tested and trained them and returned after completion of the project. He showed me the letter showing he has completed the software development and implementation. I asked him why he did not start on the hospital project? He said he had some personal problems and could not go to the hospital. I asked if you had problems why you did not come to me? I would have done something about it. Now go and monitor the project.

In the evening we have organized the party behind our house on the beachside. The guests are coming I with my partners are welcoming them. The person who has invited them is introducing them to the others.

My cousins were standing around watching the guests. Nandini is standing with them, they were speaking in Telugu so that the guests would not understand them.

Mr. Gopal was asking Mahira something. I went over to them, Mahira said he is asking about Sunitha. She said to him she is our Operations Director. I said she is one of the partners. I saw Shakha Pramukh come over and I went over to greet him. I took him around and introduced him to the guests. Then I took him over to my cousins and introduced him. then I introduced Nandini as the one from the hospital and she is coordinating with us on hospital software. He asked her how her boss is doing? Then I took him to meet the courier company MD. He told the MD how I helped during the riots and how they could reduce the loss of life during the riots. He also told him how I escaped from the death at the Air India building bombing. The MD looked at me you were there at the time of the bombing? I said I must be around 3 miles when I heard the bomb go off, I stopped the car and looked back. He asked why did you go there? I said I took Sunitha for a hearing at the Air India office. She could not attend the hearing and she did not go for her duty from that time. I was asking her to join our firm for a long time, at last, she joined us now. when did you take her he asked? I said last month's board meeting we have inducted her. I left Shakha Pramukh at the bar and went over to a guest who just arrived. He is a potential client of Loveleen's firm. I introduced myself and looked around for either Sahithi or Loveleen, they both were not seen around. I found Nishitha and handed him over to her. I looked around and Mahira called me over. I thought they want to discuss the offer for software services. I went over and looked at Mahira. Mahira said he wants to ask you a question. I said tell me, sir. He asked what he was telling about you helping them, I understand he is Maharashtra Sena Pramukh? I said I was consulting them for the last year. He asked what kind of consulting? I said I had helped the Haryana CM on some matter and he came to know that and taking my consultation from then on. He asked how do you know the CM. Loveleen, our partner is the daughter of CM and we are working together for some time. He seemed to be taken aback by my statement. He asked so you are helping Shakha Pramukh? I said we were working on something software wise. He is the one who got us the Hospital Project. He asked do you think they will come to power in the next elections? I said if my calculations are correct and they follow the guidelines I drew for them, they should be in power in two years' time. How can you say that with confidence? I said because we have used the formula in Haryana, we are the people who work in the background. He asked how did you do it? I said our first operation was discrediting a minister. When the minister resigned and the elections were

announced. I prepared software and fed the data into it to draw permutations and combinations which helped in the elections and as we predicted they won the elections and Loveleen's father became CM. Until that time, I did not know she was CM's daughter. These buildings are gifts of those elections. Those political doings are only known to a handful of people. Showing Shakha Pramukh I said he is my link to the Sena. What are you doing for them? We are analyzing the state electoral composition and how they fared in the last elections. Still, working on some theories with them. These riots and bomb blasts have changed the scene in the state. We are working around them. He asked then why don't you publicize your work. I said this is only my side work, I don't need to concentrate on these things. My main work is computer software, my whole concentration is on that. Now you see Nandini's father is a businessman from Hyderabad, he is going to build a hospital there, we offered support in building that hospital financially. Then I have done some service that pulls people from troubles and problems. I said come I will show our offices. I took them to my office and shown around. This interior decoration was done by my wife. Our house, we decorated conservatively. We don't want to show off. If you are interested in interior decoration work, you should look at Loveleen's house, it is just the other side of our house. He said can I have look at it? I said certainly and took them over to her house. We entered the hall and found Sahithi and Loveleen discussing something. I said he is a courier company MD and he is interested in seeing your house. Sahithi showed them the house and explained the interior works done there.

Later I took them to my house and showed them the changes we got made.

From there we went to the party area. I left them in the care of Nishitha.

I went to Mahira and asked where is Kirit I have not seen him. She said he is delayed he should be here any minute. I said go and check the courier company guys, see if they have changed their mind about computerization.

I took a glass and sat down. Then I remembered Sahithi and Loveleen, why they are not at the party. I finished the drink in a gulp and got up and went over to Loveleen's house. Sahithi is sitting on the sofa and Loveleen is not seen around. I asked why aren't you at the party, there are many of your clients present. Nishitha can't attend to them all. She said I am going and got up and went away. I looked around, a servant came I asked him where is Loveleen? He said she is in her room. I went to her room knocked on the door. She said come in. I opened the door and looked in. She is just putting Dhruv down. I asked what happened? She said Sahithi seems to have some misunderstanding. I cleared her doubts. I

asked all her doubts are cleared? She said it seems to be cleared. I asked are you coming back to the party? She said I will put him to sleep and come. I said then I will go back to the party. She said remember one thing you were there whenever I need you. Keep that up, that's all I want from you nothing else.

I went back to the party and Sahithi is moving through the guest as if nothing happened. I heaved a sigh of relief, I did not know how to attend to their clients. I looked for Sunitha, she was sitting at a table and Mr. Gopal sat at her table, it seems he is trying to impress her with something. I know her very well, he could not impress her with anything, I smiled inside and looked around. I thought where is Kirit and went and asked Nishitha where is Kirit do you have any idea. She said it seems my father went to their house for discussing our marriage plans. He told me he will ask them for his Kundali and get it checked with his Maharaj. I asked Maharaj? She said he looks at astrology charts and advice. I said ok. Then what could be the delay?

I went over to Mahira, did you speak with Kirit? She said around one hour back. He said he is leaving for the party, he should be here by now. I tried again and no one is picking the phone. It seems no one is there at home. I said it seems odd, some servant should be there at home.

I wanted to save the VP from humiliation, I went over to Sunitha and said Loveleen is asking for you, come with me. She looked up and understood what I am implying and got up and said to him, I will just be back. I took her outside and asked what is he cooking? He is saying to come to horse races tomorrow. I asked horse racing? She said he is telling me I could be his lucky charm, he wants me to stand beside him at the races. I said it is the new pick up line I am hearing. Go inside and sit at my library for some time and come back. She asked you have a library in your house. I said go to the first floor, you will find the room with an open door, it is second from the last room. She went away. I came back to the party. I find Loveleen moving around the guests. Mr. Gopal called and asked me where is Sunitha, you called her away saying Loveleen is asking for her, now Loveleen is here and where is Sunitha. I said she must have called to look after the baby, so she could come here. He said then I want to speak with Loveleen. I asked is it to do with interior designing then I will ask Sahithi, Loveleen is not looking after the business nowadays. He said not about interior designing, I just want to speak to her. I went over to Loveleen and whispered to her the VP of the courier company wanted to speak with you, earlier I took away Sunitha from him saying you were asking for her. Now I said you might have called her for looking after the kid. She said I will go and speak with him.

I looked around for Mr. Lal he seems happy with his drink. I looked for Shakha Pramukh, he is talking with Nandini and he came over to me and said I had to take leave there is some urgent work. I said thanks for coming over and he went over. I looked over for Loveleen, she is sitting with the VP with a glass in her hand chatting with him. I know she can take care of herself and did not interfere in their chat. Sahithi is talking with a group of guys, who might be interested in interior designing. She seemed to be enjoying herself. After so long I have seen her in a jovial mood. After Sneha's death, she went into a shell. It seems nowadays she is coming out of her shell. I looked for Mahira, she is not seen around, might have gone out for a fag. Remembering I went out to the paan shop to buy a packet. At the paan shop, I saw Mr. D'Souza chatting with the panwala. I asked for a packet and said to him, hi Mr. D'Souza. He said hi, you seemed to be having a party? I said we just shifted here and I am giving a party on that occasion. He asked this is your office, no? Yes, that is our office and this is our house. You can come for a drink. he said I can't come like this. I said then come over and sit there I will bring something for you. I went and brought a bottle of whiskey and gave it to him. He asked you are not having anything. I said I don't drink much, I just came over for a fag and lit a fag. He asked who is in your home? I said my wife Sahithi and two kids Atul and Reena. He asked Sahithi is she the Maharashtrian girl who used to come here to remodel the office. I said yes. He asked how did you marry her, love marriage? I said you can say that. He asked how do you know the Punjabi lady beside your house? I said she is a partner in our business. He said you tell me if you need typewriters. I said we don't use typewriters, we use computers. You better shift to computers, typewriters will be history in the future. He asked is that so. But how do you know my name? I said I told you before Krishna from Vakola told me about you, if I meet you he told me to remember him. He asked Krishna, thin, tall little dark guy from Goa? I said he is the one, I put him at the factory I used to work. He is assisting the owner. I remembered Kirit and said just a minute I will make a call and come. I went inside and called Kirit's house, there was no picking up the phone. I came and sat down again. How many children do you have I asked? He replied I have two daughters and a son. My elder daughter is working as a Nurse and she is married and my younger daughter is studying degree. My son works at Pune. I said good. You seemed to have rebuilt the house recently. He said yes, we all pooled the money and rebuild the building. I said so this is your own property. He said yes. Come to our house for lunch, my wife makes tasty seafood. I said I will certainly come one of these days. Don't drink the bottle now, take some home. I will see you then if you need anything ask me. He said

thanks. I got up and went inside. I once more rang up Kirit's number and no reply still.

I went back to the party, slowly people are dispersing. They are saying goodbyes to the ones who called them to the party and leaving. I looked at the VP, he still chatting with Loveleen, I thought I had to intervene now, otherwise, he will not leave her side. I went to her and said your servant is asking for you. She got up and said it seems my son woke up, I will go and see. She mouthed thanks and went away. I asked him do you want anything, sir? He said can you get something to eat? I said certainly sir and called a waiter and told him to look after him and went over to Mahira. Earlier I was looking for you. She asked do you have any fags? I gave her the packet I brought. She said thanks and went over to the beach. Sunitha, Sahithi and Nishitha were sitting and eating. I let them do their thing and went over to the bar took a glass and came and sat down at an empty table. I don't know how many software projects I will get, but they are sure to get interior decorating orders. Orders or no orders, I think I am doing pretty good at this juncture. Two buildings, one office and one house, bank balance, even the kids are taken care of. Sahithi's career is taking off. She is in a good position. Even if something happens to me now, the kids are in good hands. Maybe Sahithi and Sunitha will miss me for some time then they will go on with life. I went out and sat on the sand looking at the dark sea listening to the lapping.

I came out of my reverie when Mahira came and sat beside me and dropped the packet of cigarettes on my lap. I took one and lit it. I took a drag and Mahira took it from me and took a drag and gave it back. She asked what are you thinking? I said nothing. She asked are you missing Sneha? I said nothing like that, just enjoying the sea. She said I thought you were sad. I said I am not sad I am happy, I could achieve all this in a short time. I am not even thirty and I could get all this and you friends. It is just life throws a curveball at you when you least expect it. I am just wondering about the future. Even if something happens to me I am sure you are all there for Sahithi and the kids. I have that confidence in you all that I am happy I got friends like you all. Even if I have not got much I am sure I got friends like you who are much worthier than all this wealth. That is why I wanted to share all of this with you and made you all be with me to be partners. I know in my absence you can take this forward.

Mahira asked why are you talking like this? Have you seen any bad omens? I said nothing like that, I am just thinking about life.

We sat there smoking and looking at the sea. After some time, she got up and said let us go in. everyone must be wondering where you disappeared. I got up and gave her a hand, she caught my hand stood up, we both went inside. Almost all the guests have left. Few of them are having their dinner and ready to leave. I went inside and looked at Library. Sunitha is sitting there reading something. I went in and asked what are you doing here? She said you told me to sit in the library I came here and could not resist all these books. I said once you said you like mystery books. I don't know you would be like this when you see books. You can take these books to your room and can read in your free time. Did you have your dinner? She said I had something, how can I go home? I said you stay the night. Then I will read for some more time. I said ok, as you wish. I will look you up later and went to my bedroom. Changed and came back and sat in front of her.

My mind went over the times we spent together. When she was away I used to wait for her to come back to Bombay, now she is staying back in Bombay we are not getting any opportunity to be together. I thought if I keep her close, we can be closer now instead are we growing further? No, I don't think we would grow further. It is just she was coming daily to the office, we could not get to meet like before. I have to plan something else. Maybe pick her daily, something like that.

Sahithi came over and my thought process broke up, she asked what are you doing here? I said Sunitha is reading and I am thinking about software. I thought maybe we need software to plan these things and smiled at my thought. What are you smiling about asked Sahithi? I said I got an idea for software. Sahithi asked what software? I said it is just an idea, I have to think it over. Give Sunitha a room for sleeping, I am going to the bedroom.

I went and lay on the bed and thought can we do everything with computers and software. Shall we let the computers decide what to do and what not to do? I slipped into sleep.

Chapter 10

Kumar

I got up and went to the bathroom brushed and went to the kitchen, Chitti handed me a cup of coffee, I took the coffee and returned to the hall. I called Kirit's home no. He took the call and I asked him where have to disappeared? He said Mr. Patel got my Kundali read by his priest and they said there was some dosha in my Kundali and he wanted to do some puja for that. We had to go out of the city to perform the puja and that's why I could not attend the puja. I said you did not even inform Nishitha. We were all worried the whole night, I thought you might have been kidnapped again by Dolly. He said nothing like that happened. Where we went there were no STD booths available to inform you. Now we returned home and I will meet you later on the way to the factory. I said ok, see you then and cut the call.

Completing my bath, dressed, and had my breakfast, took Sahithi's flat keys I went to the office and sat down at my table. I checked the progress of the project. It is still going slower to my estimates. I started writing my observations on the project. Halfway through, Kirit came over and sat opposite to me. I asked everything went well? He said everything is ok. Now Mr. Patel agreed to the marriage after the puja. I asked where did the puja performed? He said somewhere interior near Pune. I gave him the key to Sahithi's flat and said you take this key to our flat, stay there for some time and be close to Nishitha. I think you were not close to her, stay close to her and spend some time with her. He took the keys and said a good idea to be near her. I said you don't call Mahira there, if the neighbours see her and they will not only gossip and what they might say to Nishitha mother. Don't spoil a good thing with wrong decisions. He said ok and left. I think he might visit her on the way.

I completed the document I am writing saved in the server and informed the team.

Now I have to consider what I have to do about Sunitha's situation. Earlier Sunitha's flat is close by to our house and the factory. Now she is working with us and her flat is a little far. It is difficult to meet her. I have to take her to her flat and that would raise a red flag. So, we need to find something closer for her. Now that would be difficult. Can I give her a room here in the office to stay? Still, it will be difficult to meet up. There will be fear of someone seeing us. Something I have to think of. Where is she? She stayed back last night. I got up went out for a fag.

Smoking I went to our gate and asked the watchman had he seen Sunitha? He said she left around 7am. She must have gone back to her flat. I asked him to give me my bike keys, took the bike for a ride. I reached Sunitha's house in 35 minutes. I knocked on the door. Sunitha opened and said I thought someone else knocked, did you not have the keys? I said I did not get my keys. Come on we don't have much time. She asked what is the rush? I said I just came here on a whim, did not tell anyone. She asked So, what is the problem? I said I could not keep you away for long. I don't know how to make time to meet you up. Earlier when you were away, I waited for you to return, now I could not wait when you are around and I couldn't even touch you. I am getting desperate. Then I understood how much deep I have sunk. I said ok, get ready I will take you to the office. She asked why, have you changed your mind? I said I understood how much desperate I am becoming. I have to control myself. Be ready I will take you to the office and sat down on the sofa lit a fag.

Sunitha

There is a knock on the door. I thought who is knocking on the door, might be the watchman. I opened the door it is Kumar at the door. Normally, he would have opened with his keys. I asked him did he forgot his keys? He said he did not have his keys and seemed to be in a hurry. He was talking as if he is missing me and suddenly his demeanour changed he said get ready I will take you to the office. What happened suddenly. Did he realize I was not ready for him today? Or is it something else, however, he came to pick me up. I got ready and we went to the office together.

Kumar

I parked the bike went to my room and sat down. What did I just do?

I sat thinking about what is happening around me. Decided to do something about it and took the car went over to the hospital. Met the administrator and asked him do you have a psychiatrist in your hospital? He said yes, we have, do you want a consult. I said yes. He called the boy and told him to take me to Dr. Sabariwal, tell him he is one of us. I went with him and he introduced me to the doctor. He asked me what is the problem? I said my wife has had a problem for some time. What problem he asked. I said she has become rigid from the time of death of my first wife. He asked so you came here for your second wife? I said yes. I will tell you clearly. I had married Sneha, ours is a love marriage, we eloped and married. At my sister's marriage, we went to Hyderabad she went missing there. I became mentally unstable and Sahithi took care of me and we

married later. Then my first wife came back. They were living together then we opened a hotel and when a hand is needed there I sent Sneha my first wife there to help and she met with a fire accident. Now my second wife Sahithi thinks she is responsible for her death and became unresponsive in bed and I was looking outside for my requirements. Recently, Sneha's death mystery cleared and it was found Sahithi is not at all responsible for her death. But she is not her former self. What should I do? He asked so you are saying you are having another woman in your life. I said yes. He asked does she know about her? I said she knew her, but I don't know if she suspects our relations. He said you bring her here for couples' therapy. Then I speak with her and find her problem. I asked him when can I bring her? You fix a time with our receptionist. I said thanks and came out. I went to the administrator and told him about taking time with the doctor. He called the reception fixed a time for two days later. I said thanks and went back to the office.

I sat back on the chair and thought about what I am doing. I am sure I am doing the right thing by going to the doctor. I should have done this a long time back, if Sunitha was not there in life, I would have done that. It seems my eyes have opened now.

I thought a minute and rang Sahithi office and asked her can you provide a room for Sunitha at our house? She asked why? I said she is having trouble with the transport, she was having a cab facility with the airport. Now she is having trouble. I thought she should stay close. If don't have a room, I will think of giving her a room at the office. She said ok, I will see what I can do. I cut the call.

I went over to Sunitha's room and told her I asked for a room at our house. She asked why the trouble? I said I want you to stay close by. Earlier you were having cab facility, now how can you come over here? She asked did Sahithi agreed to give me room. I said she agreed when I said I will give her a room at the office if she did not have room for her. Sunitha said thanks. I came back to my room. I looked at the packet of fags, it is empty. I went out to the paan shop. I asked him for a packet. He removed a packet and gave me. I told him to note it down. Now I am running a tab with him. I took out a fag and lit it. Panwala said something. I said what? D'Souza was asking about you. I said what he is asking? For his elder daughter marriage, he took some loans and he is having trouble repaying them. He wants to ask for a job for his younger daughter. I said I told him to ask for any help, why is he hesitating. Tell him to come and meet me.

I gave him some money told him to adjust against my account went to my office. I made a cup of tea and sat down on my chair.

Pauline rang up and said Mr. Gopal is online. I said give him. I took the call and said how are you sir, what can I do for you. He said can you come over here, we want to discuss the operation with you. I asked when shall I come? He said can you come over now, our international operations man from the USA is there. I said I will be there in half an hour. I went over to Sunitha said I have got a call from the VP of the courier company, he is calling me to discuss the operations, come with me. She put her face on am I required to come? I said you just sit there with me, he won't trouble you in my presence. She got up and I went to Mahira's room and told her I am going to the courier company. She asked shall I come? I said I am taking Sunitha with me, I don't think you are required. You carry on your work, I just want to inform you.

We took the car and reached their office. I went to the second floor, his secretary greeted us and sat us in the conference room and went away. MD's butler came and put two glasses of coco-cola in front of us and went away. We sipped and waited for them to come. After some time three men entered the room. Mr. Gopal introduced the man as the Operations Manager of the parent company Mr. Smith and he wants to know how we are planning the operation of updating the software for the branches. He asked me how are you planning this operation of computerizing the branches? I said we have two options one you send the computers to your branches and I will send my man to install and train your men how to operate the software. He asked what is the second option. I said we will prepare the systems here and send them through courier and we will send our man as a courier with the systems and they will train and come back. He asked what software you are proposing for our branches? I will explain what I know about your operations. You have National and International services. You have a different receipt for national and international operations. International receipts have barcoding. Am I correct? He said we are planning for barcoding for national operations too. I said then it will be easier. The branch operations scan the bar codes of the parcels they receive at the hub. When they are dispatched to their branch or another branch they scan out the parcels. The scanned data is saved to a file and sent back to the HO. The HO updates the data in their servers. Same way when the branches deliver the parcels they update the data and send it to us as files. In the same way, you can send the data with the parcels to the branches. Then the international data can be sent to your international operations. He asked how the data will be sent as files? I said we will use computers connected through a telephone line. There are some software for that, we can use modems to connect through telephones and send and receive the data. He asked is it possible for you to develop software that can do all these functions. I said I am sure we can do it. Mr. Lal looked at Mr.

Smith. He said the system is workable, we look into it to be used internationally. He asked me how fast can you develop the software? I said it won't take long, maybe two to three days. He said you start preparing the software and give us an estimate for the whole operation. We will give you an advance of 1 Lakh for you to start the software development. We will discuss the operation when you give us an estimate. MD called the accounts department to send a cheque for 1 lakh in the name of the company. We waited for the cheque to be sent from accounts. The MD took the cheque and signed it and gave it to me. I took the cheque and said thanks and came out of the conference room with Sunitha.

Sunitha said this thing has gone well, how do you know about their operations? I said I knew only a little, I heard when Mahira was discussing with Tony and Kirit about the operations. Remaining things I assumed of their working procedures. She said I did not think it would be this easy to get projects. I said this is not easy, we have been working on this for the last month. I gave Mahira this idea and sent her to speak to them. Then later we had a meeting where I explained what we can do for them. Then again, we met at the party. Let us go to the office and put our developers to work.

We reached the office and I called the developers and explained to them what is required for the courier company. They need to scan packages with barcode scanners and the software had to catch the data. They need to create files of the data generated and sent through modems. Rajesh said they can do it as he had an idea of how this can be achieved. I told him we have three days to prepare the software and we need at least two men to install and train the users of the software. I think it would be better they call all the members for a training session at HO, I will tell this as a possibility. You can go and start the work.

I went to Mahira's room and knocked and opened the door. She looked up and said coming. I went out of the office and lit a fag. She came after two minutes. I gave her a fag and told her about getting the advance from the courier company. I said this is the way to create opportunities. If you are following up with any company come to me with the details. We will together see what we can do for that company. She said ok, I will do that. Completing our fags, we went inside.

After some time, Pauleen rang me and said a Mr. D'Souza is here and he wants to meet you. I said send him. I heard a knock on the said come in. Pauleen opened the door let Mr. D'Souza in. I told him please sit down. Tell me what I can do for you. He said you told me to come and see you. I said yes, what I can

do for you? He said nowadays business is not that much and over that, I had some loans from my daughter's marriage. It has become very difficult to run the house. If you can give a job to my daughter it will be a big help. I asked what she studied? He said she is in the third-year degree. I asked Is she attending the classes, he said yes. I asked what would be her timings? He said morning 7 am to 12 noon. I said to tell her to come and meet me. I will see what I can do for you. He said I will see you then and went away.

I went over to the house for lunch. Chitti brought dishes and put them on the table. This is a bigger table than we have at Sahithi's house. It can sit around 20 people. I asked where are the children. She said they are in their playroom. I asked they did not go to the school. She said bhabhi said she will get admission at a nearby school. I said ok, so they are in the house the whole day. She said yes, they are playing the whole day. I said I will speak to Sahithi about this.

After completing lunch, I called Sahithi asked about the children's school. She said she spoke to the principal of a school at Santacruz. I will go and pay the fees and get the admission. I said ok do that and let me know.

I got out of the house lit a fag walked to the office. I saw D'Souza standing at the paan shop, I went over there and told him I don't know how I can help you but you must be visiting many clients, if anyone of them wants software you let me know for every order we receive we will pay you a commission. Is it okay with you? He said I don't have a problem advertising your company, but I don't know anything about software. I said you don't have to sell them anything, if you identify the client, I will send my men there. I will get you some business cards, give me your phone no. I will put that no as your house number. About your daughter, I have thought of something for her. I don't want her studies disturbed, so, I am proposing she work as a teacher at my house. I have two kids in 1st class, then I have a maid to look after them. I want your daughter to teach her English and other etiquette. It is our responsibility to look after her. I want her to be taught something for the future. Can she do that? He said why not. I will send her over. I said do that.

I went over to my room sat down and thought what else I can do? I rang up Sunitha asked what are you doing? She said nothing. I asked did you have your lunch? She said no. I said I forgot about you, let us go for lunch. I took her to my house. I asked Chitti do you have something to eat for Sunitha. She said there is rice, dal and curd. Shall I fry something? I looked at Sunitha. She said if you have eggs, make an omelette. Chitti said sit down I will bring it. She went and brought the omelette and brought a plate and placed it in front of her. She started

eating. I said this is all new experience I did not remember you for lunch. She said it is ok. I said I will remember next time. Let us have everything streamlined.

The phone rang, I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Pauleen on the phone, she said there is a Miss D'Souza her for you, I said to send her to the house. I went out to the hall. Watchman brought her to the door and went away. I said come in. she came inside I told her to sit down. She sat on the sofa. I asked what is your name? she said, Nikita D'Souza. I called Chitti. I told her Chitti this is Nikita she is here to teach you English. I asked Nikita do you know to teach Hindi. She said yes. I said to Nikita just teach Chitti basic Hindi also. She needs to learn some etiquette. She is my cousin from the village she does not know Hindi. Chitti show her the kids. They went to the children's room.

Sunitha finished her lunch and came out to the hall. We both went to the children's playroom. The four of them were playing. I told to Nikita come and meet me at the office, we went over to the office.

We went to our office and sat down. I prepared two cups of tea and gave her one took one.

Pauleen knocked on the door and said Nikita here, I said come in. sit down Nikita. So, what is your opinion of the work? It is up to the time you finish your degree, ok. She said it is ok for me. I said then you coordinate with Chitti. She said ok, I will do that. I asked how much salary you want? She said two thousand five hundred. I said ok. You can start from tomorrow. She said thank you sir and went away.

Sunitha asked when she said the salary you just said ok, why? I said if she asked more I would have said yes, her father had financial problems, that is why she is ready to work. She asked why are you so concerned about them? I said because I know the value of the money. I know how it feels not having the money when needed. He took loans for his elder daughter's marriage. Now he is being troubled by the people who he took loans from. It is just a small token of help for him. I am getting her to help and I am paying for it. You know when I was studying in inter, Sneha was going by rickshaw and I was going to college by walk. It is half an hour walk to college from home. Sneha wanted me to come with her in the rickshaw. But she needed five rupees extra per month for taking me with her. I did not have that and she made an agreement with the rickshawala he will take us on a rickshaw for four days and we will walk for two days. Thinking about those days my eyes filled, she had endured so much for me and I could not give her the life she wanted. This regret will be there with me

my whole life. I feel for them, but I don't want to give anything free. They have to earn for it. I offered Mr. D'Souza to bring clients and get the commission. So, if he wants money he had to earn it. I am giving him an opportunity, to take or not is his lookout. If he wants to clear his loans he will get us, clients. You see once Kirit gave me an opportunity to show my talent. If anyone wants an opportunity I will give them that.

Sunitha said I only saw the romantic side of you until now, I don't know you have this side also. I said I am as soft as butter in my heart. She said what is this? There is a knock on the door and Rajesh came over and showed me the document for the courier software. I said I will study this and let him know. He went back.

She asked what would I be doing here? I said as operations director you need to look after the operations of the firm. You need to have all the departments under your control. How you do that is up to you. You take your own time and get going. We are at the start, you have some time for you to take control of things. I will guide you during this transition time, don't worry.

Mahira knocked on the door and opened it, I said I am coming and got up said to Sunitha I will be back in a minute.

After our fag we returned to the room, I said come in we are discussing what Sunitha would be doing. We sat down and I asked Mahira tell me what Sunitha could be doing in operations. Mahira said you have appointed her, you tell what she would be doing? I said I already told her what she could be doing, you tell her what she can do. Mahira said you can look after accounts, finance, HR etc.

I said that's it whatever is not covered by anyone is your operations. You are going to be the whole and sole of the company. You are a director and you have to look after all the things of the company. Understood? She nodded her head.

Mahira got up and said I am going home. Come I will drop you and then drop Sunitha at her flat. I took the car keys and started the car. Sunitha sat beside me and Mahira sat behind. I dropped Mahira opposite her gate and we drove to Sunitha's flat. I stopped at the flat. She got down and asked are you not coming in? I said I know you had a problem when you were questioning me, see you tomorrow and drove out to the house.

By the time I reached home, Sahithi returned. I told her about appointing Nikita for teaching the children and Chitti. She asked what she will teach Chitti? I said English, Hindi and etiquettes. She said what is the need? I said she would help

you in organizing the parties. We both need parties for increasing clientele. I got the offer from the courier company.

She asked so what is your next move? I said I am thinking about making it a product of the software we gave to Kirit for the factory. The Hospital software also we will develop as a product than customized software. I told Nandini about helping in the building of the hospital because we can sell them the software. When they are setting up the departments here she will help make the software we are developing. So, it will fit her requirements like a glove.

Sahithi said now you are thinking like a true businessman. I said before coming here while studying I looked after my grandfather's business for three years. So, I know something about business. She asked how can you compare this to that?

I said see you know the differences in the business. If you give me a chance I can improve your company too. She asked how can you do that? I said I will give you some tips, now how are you getting your clients? She said mostly through the mouth or through the parties Loveleen throws. I said so you are covering a small portion of the people. You don't advertise or have salesmen. You can advertise where high-class people move like malls and theatres. You can employ people to distribute pamphlets. Or put the pamphlets in the newspapers in upmarket areas. Small things like that. Or you can outsource it to us we will do your advertisement and whatever clients you get through us you have to pay us a commission. She said I think we should sit with Loveleen and discuss these things. I said let us do that one of these days. She said so you want to start a kind of consultancy? Who will look after that? I said Sunitha is there to look after these things. If she requires help I will appoint an assistant for her.

I said I will just come and came out. I went over to Loveleen's house and she came out with Dhruv after five minutes. I played with him for some time and handed him back. I asked her when will you be back at the office? She said she is yet to decide. I said take your own time, I am thinking about your turnover. She asked what about it? I said how much increase in business you had recently. She said around 10 per cent. I said you now have two assistants to look after the business, does ten per cent a little lower for your expectations. She said it seems so. I said I was talking with Sahithi about that, I told her to give us the business of bringing you clients and pay us a commission for that. I want you to outsource your marketing to us. Loveleen asked who will look after the marketing. I am thinking of passing on the work to Sunitha. I asked Sahithi to give her a room at our house. She will be close by and we can use her judiciously. I am giving her all the departments where we don't have staff.

Loveleen said let us have a discussion with Sahithi and Nishitha about outsourcing. I said we will do that and got up and came out of the house.

I thought why do we have to come out to the road when we are moving around the houses. We should have gates installed. I made a mental note to speak to Sahithi about that. I lit a fag and walked towards our house.

I entered the house and looked for Sahithi, I thought she would be in the kitchen supervising dinner. I went to the kitchen, as I expected she is in the kitchen instructing what to make. I said to Sahithi you call your men and install a gate between our buildings. She asked why? I said if we have to move from office and house we had to go out to the road and come inside. Same thing with Loveleen's house. I want small gates to be installed between our houses, where we can freely move between houses. Also, I want to install barbed wire running on the outer walls of the three properties. She said ok. I asked her did you identify a room for Sunitha. She said let us go and see. She took me to the far end of the hall and said this is a big room and I have put a double bed here and it has attached bathroom, I reserved this for your parents. I said ok next room. She opened the room and said this room does not have a bathroom attached. The next room is small would take a single cot bed and it has an attached bathroom. I said this room should do. She asked would a single cot in this room would do for her. I said this room should be perfect for her. She might have thought I would sneak into her room in the night, so she was asking does a single bed would do. When I myself said a single bed would do her doubts seem to be cleared. I remembered our appointment with the doctor. I said I had consulted a psychiatrist, and he opined that we should go as a couple to him for a consult. I have an appointment day after tomorrow at 11 am. As I told her it was for my problem I had consulted the doctor, she immediately agreed to come with me. She wanted to help me get better. She did not know the reason I asked for a room for Sunitha is to keep her away. She said she will get the room ready for Sunitha, tell her to get her things and come. Until this room is ready she can stay in the last room. Once she is settled you ask your parents to come to live with us for at least some time. I said will certainly ask them.

Chitti came and announced dinner is ready. We had our dinner and sat down in the hall watching some tv. Sahithi asked do I have to talk to the doctor? I said you have to tell him about me. What kind of problems you are facing with me? So, I can understand what am I missing, and the doctor can advise me based on his observations. I thought now it must be clear for her that I am taking her there for my problem not to do anything with her, in reality, it is the opposite.

I said I am going to the Library to read for some time and got up and went to the library. I picked up a book and sat behind the desk. I kept thinking will she become normal? Why did she went into a shell when Sneha died? What did she do other than telling the man about Sneha's whereabouts? If it's the only guilty feeling she had, then why she did not become normal when it has come to our knowledge that it was not her mistake when she told him about the hotel she is living in. what has happened to her, she became so rigid she has not come closer to me from that day? Did she push me towards Sunitha? Or is it my mistake to ignore Sahithi and went over to Sunitha to fill my bodily needs? I think there is a big mistake on my part, I should acknowledge that. But what happened in her life which made her keep me at a distance? Has something other than Sneha's death happened in her life? How can I know? Is it a mystery, can I solve it in my lifetime? Let us see what the doctor comes up with. He can only solve her mystery.

Thinking about her I did not know when I dozed off, I woke up when Sahithi touched on my shoulder and said come into the bedroom. I got up, put the book in its place switched off the lights closed the door and went to the bedroom. I lay on the bed face up looking at the ceiling. Sahithi lay beside me put her hand on my chest and asked what the doctor would ask me? I said he would not ask you anything, you have to say what you want to say for my sake. You tell whatever comes to your mind. It is not compulsory you should say something, you can keep quiet and refuse to say anything. It seems she is scared to talk about her feelings or what happened with her. I slipped into sleep.

Sahithi

I was scared to go with Kumar to the doctor. But it might be to my advantage. If I can say what was in my mind all these years, I should be relieved of my guilty feeling. Yes, I should come clean with the doctor.

Chapter 11

Kumar

I had a bath and dressed up and called Sunitha. I told her to be ready with packed bags, I would come to pick her up and Sunitha is making a room ready for her. I took the car and went over to her flat. She is packing her bags. I told her to pack only immediate required dresses and makeup items. We will see later what are her things and what we got at the time of renting the flat.

I packed fast the dresses she removed from the cupboard took them out, put them in the car. I told the watchman we are going away for some time, we will see we should keep the flat or not. Another thing is Sunitha's flat is already vacant. I said I will check when the rent is due and inform him before that about our decision, giving him a hint of vacating the flat.

I drove to our house and asked the watchman to bring one suitcase and took another went to her room. It seems her room is not ready yet, I said this would be your room and for the time being you stay in another room until Sahithi would set up the room. I put her bags in the room showed her the things in the room and said let us have breakfast. I came to you without having breakfast.

We went over to the dining hall and asked Chitti to get us breakfast. Chitti came over with the breakfast dishes and placed them on the table. I asked her what the children are doing? She said they are still sleeping. I said ok, today Nikita would be coming, learn everything she teaches. Ask her if you have any doubts.

We both sat and had our breakfast and I took her to the library. Chitti brought two cups of tea to the library. Yesterday I did not get a chance to look at the document prepared by Rajesh. I looked through the document in the system placed in the Library, corrected and saved it back to the server. I said to Sunitha yesterday I had a talk with Loveleen and Sahithi about taking over their marketing. I want them to hand over the promotions and sales to us and they will pay us a commission to us. This way we can move our profits around. If we have more profits and taxes to pay we will absorb the expenses of the promotions else if their profits are more and taxes are high then we will bill them the expenses and their taxes can be reduced.

So, I want you to take charge of this division. She asked what will I do there? I said first you start with learning their work. You go with Sahithi and Nishitha and see how they are working. Then we will discuss how to go about marketing. I am already working on marketing. I have already told Mr. D'Souza to sell our

products to his clients. We can use his channel for marketing Interior designing also. All you have to do is to manage these people, can you do that? She said I think I can manage people. I said Mahira is also there to help you. But I want this division separate from our marketing. So, you will have separate budgets and expenses. Based on the performance of this division I can recommend you for higher remuneration. Are you following me? She said yes. I understand you want me to promote over Mahira. I said that is my train of thoughts. Let us go to the office.

I checked with Rajesh how the software is coming along. I told him when the software is ready to inform me. Then I enquired about the hospital project. Check with Nandini if there are any changes to be made to the software.

I sat down and prepared documentation for the operation up-gradation for the courier company. I prepared different approaches and costs for the same. I checked the documents and printed and kept them aside.

I looked at the time it is 1:30 pm, lunchtime. I got up and went to Sunitha's room asked her shall we have lunch? She said she is coming got up came over. We both went to our house. After finishing our lunch, we went into the library. I asked her what have you thought about what I said in the morning. She said I was thinking about it and preparing the list of items I can do. I will give you something by the evening about how can we achieve what you have in mind.

Chitti brought us two cups of tea, we finished the tea went over to the office. I went to my room and Sunitha went to her room.

I called Mahira and gave her the documents I prepared for the courier company and said hand them the documents, and let me know what they say about the costing. She said she will hand over the documents and go home. I said do that.

I went to the paanwala for a packet of fags. He gave me a packet and said I heard you gave Nikita some job. I said yes, I asked her to teach my kids, as she is still studying I don't want her disturbed by full-time work. Did she go to my house? He said I have not seen her, she might be delayed in the college. I lit a fag walked to the office. It seems Sahithi send some men to work on the gates between the buildings. Some workers are working on the walls by breaking them. Now we can move around the buildings without disturbing the watchmen.

After some time Sahithi and Nishitha came over and were supervising the workmen. I called Nishitha and took her to my room, told her to sit down. I

asked her what happened about the marriage date. She said they have consulted purohit and the date is not fixed yet. I asked is there a problem? It seems they have got some pujas performed. She replied I don't really know, I don't like these superstitions, it is all my father's doing. I don't go into their religious matters. I said that is a correct approach of yours, if you believe it will pull you deep into it, where you could not get out. I stopped believing them. I gave Kirit our house keys, so he can be closer to your house and you would get to spend some time. Do you two get any quality time? She said he had not told me about you giving the keys, he still must be staying at Dadar only. Maybe this Saturday or Sunday he might be coming there to stay. I said I also felt that. You want some tea? She said yes. I got up prepared two cups and brought them to the table. She said you have a setup here for tea and coffee. I said it is for my selfish reasons. I don't like asking people to get me tea or coffee. I prepare myself at home also.

Completing tea, she got up and said seeing you and I said see you and she went away.

I went to our house Chitti is playing with the kids in the hall. They came running towards me calling daddy. I caught each one with each hand and guided them to the sofa. I asked did you go to school today? They said in unison no. I asked why? Reena said Chitti did not take us. I said now you will go to a new school. Your mummy will put you in a new school.

I asked Chitti Nikita did not come? She replied no. I said she must have got some work or delayed. I sat playing with the kids.

Sahithi, Sunitha and Nishitha came over to the house. I asked them do you want to have tea. Sahithi said yes. Chitti got up went to prepare tea. I asked so, is the gate work still going on? She said there are breaking the wall, tomorrow they will fix the gates.

I asked Sahithi did you arrange Sunitha's room? She said I did not get time to get the bed for her. I said for the time being I put her in the last room. She said it's ok I will get the bed tomorrow. I looked at Sunitha she nodded her head.

Sunitha said I will change and come and went to her room. Sahithi also went to her room to change. Chitti brought tea and gave me my cup and one to Nishitha. She asked where are the others. I said they went to their rooms to change. She took the cups to their rooms. I asked Nishitha you got your transportation? She said the driver went somewhere, I am waiting for him. I asked shall I drop you? After dropping you I will go and meet Kirit. Nishitha said

please take me to Kirit on the return you can drop me at my house. I said then come on, I will take you on the bike, at this time there is some traffic, we can go faster. I took the bike keys from the watchman. I am keeping the bike keys with the watchman as anyone can use it when they require it. I started the bike we went to the factory. We both went to Kirit's office. Krishna is working on something. I asked where is Kirit, he said on the shop floor. I asked him how is the work. He said it is ok. He called the shop floor saying we both are waiting for him. He said he is coming. We sat down on the chairs. Kirit came after five minutes. Krishna got up and went down. I asked is there some problem with your wedding date? He said Mr. Patel is having some doubts about the dates, it seems. I asked what are his doubts? Kirit said he does not seem to be convinced about the puja performed. Someone told him that the pujas would not suffice and advised him not to go ahead with the wedding plans. I asked so, it is Mr. Patel who wants to break off the wedding? Kirit said yes, it is his idea only. I looked at Nishitha. She said I can't go against my father's wishes. I got up and said to Nishitha come on I will drop you at your house. I asked Kirit to return the house keys as he would not need it now. he understood why I am asking him for the keys. He gave me the keys, I took them put them in my pocket, went down with Nishitha.

I stopped the bike at Nishitha's house and asked her shall I come and speak with her father? She said I will speak with him. I will tell you tomorrow. I started the bike and drove to our house.

Sahithi

Kumar took me to the doctor with him. He was saying he had some psychological problems and he had consulted the doctor and the doctor advised him to come with me. We went and sat outside the doctor's office. After five minutes the doctor called us. We went inside sat in front of the doctor. He said to Kumar can you explain your problem for Sahithi's sake. Kumar said from the time of my first wife Sneha's death we are going further away instead of getting close. The doctor looked at me I said yes, I felt that too. It has started when Sneha had died. The doctor has asked Kumar what could be the reason. He said at first, I thought Sahithi had a guilty feeling but over time I thought it might be my problem, now I can't decide anything. I don't know anything anymore. The doctor said Sahithi what do you think it could be? I did not know what to say I just looked at him.

Kumar

I looked at Sahithi, she did not reply to the doctor's question. It seems she does not want to speak up. I have to make her open up. What should I do? Shall I tell the story to make her open up? I said I had to send Sneha to help in our hotel and she had a fire accident there and died. At first, we did not understand how that could have happened. But recently we came to know the events that lead to her death. Still, Sahithi did not say anything. I did not understand how to make her come out of the shell. The doctor asked Sahithi what did you feel about her death? Did you have any guilty feelings towards that? She said no, I did not feel guilty about her death, it was an accident, why should I feel the guilt. I was sorry for the kids because they lost their mother. But my motherly feeling took over and I became their mother. I was grateful for her giving me these two beautiful children. The doctor asked then why you have become distant from each other? Did Kumar have guilty feelings because he took her away and put her at the hotel? She replied I don't think he should have any guilty feeling because he took her away after we had a fight and she asked him to take her away and an opportunity came up as they had asked him for help in running the hotel. If he had not taken her to the hotel he might have taken her to his parent's house for some time. It would have not been a big thing. The doctor asked then what could be the reason for your separation? Is he going behind other women? That could be the problem because you found out something about him? She said he was not like that. I have seen how he treats women. He was very gentle with them, even when he knows Loveleen hit him with her car, he went to her to show he was not injured. He only tried to help her out of her situation. I don't think he tried to take advantage of her situation. The doctor said then what could have happened between you two that created the situation. She said the problem was with me. She waited a moment for anyone to react. When no one said anything, she said it was me who had done a bad thing, I am not worthy of him. I have become untouchable, that's why I kept him away. I was surprised by her words. I opened my mouth to say something, the doctor showed his hand as don't say anything let her speak. She put her hands on her face bent forward started crying. I looked at the doctor. He nodded his head to wait. She rubbed her eyes and said it was all my fault. I was only trying to get some relief from work but he took advantage of my situation and also did not help me in the end. Instead of helping me, he informed all the department heads to not take me in their department. Now I understood it was something to do with her workplace. I looked at the doctor. He said it is enough for today. You come after 2 days.

I held her with shoulders pulled her up and took her outside the doctor's office.

I took her to the parking and sat her on the seat. She was not fully herself. I closed the car door and went to the other side and sat down myself, started the car drove to our house.

I parked the car and I had to help her to inside of the house. I sat down beside her and held her by the shoulders. She started crying, then put her head on my lap hid her face, still crying. I let her cry out, stroking her head with my hand. Chitti came into the hall about to ask something. I shook my head and she went away. After some time Sahithi got up and went to the bathroom to wash her face. She came back sat beside me looking down at the floor, asked you won't leave me and go away? I asked why would I do that? She said because I made a mistake. I said mistakes can be redeemable. I might have done a lot of mistakes, won't you forgive me for those? She turned her head and looked at me and said I would forgive anything you do. I said I would also forgive you for any mistakes of yours. Why would I keep anything in my mind, you made a man out of nothing. When I was down you became my strength, when Sneha passed away because of you I did not break down. It is all showing the house, because of you. I wanted to become and show what I am made up of, I have taken all these risks for you and the kids. If you act like this how can I bear it? I have done all this to know what happened. I was waiting for you to come out with your feelings, and you kept them bottled up in your heart. If you had told me all this then I could have done something about it. She said I told you I thought you would leave me and go. I asked why did you think that I would go away? Did I ever let you have that feeling, I will go away? Where will I go, I don't have any other place to go. She said I want you to know why I did what I did. I said you don't need to give any explanations, you just tell me the name and I will do what is necessary. She asked what will you do, do go and get into a fight with him? I asked what am I looking like, I pick fights with people? Have you ever seen me picking fights with anyone? We will teach him a lesson. We will make sure he never tries that with anyone else. She said ok, I will tell you who he is.

I asked Chitti to get us tea. She went into the kitchen. I sat there thinking about what should be done.

Chitti brought two cups and placed them in front of us. I gave one to Sahithi, picked one and started sipping tea. I asked do you want me to drop you at the office? She said no need, I will be supervising the work of the gates. I had to get a bed for Sunitha also. I will go to the furniture shop and order a bed. From her talking it seems she getting back to normal, I think I should let her work to forget what happened today. I said I am going to the library, if you need me come there.

I went and sat down on my chair. Thought for a minute, called Loveleen and said what Dhruv is doing. She said he just had milk and playing by himself. I said why don't you come to my library, leave Dhruv with the kids. She said I will come in twenty minutes. I said see you and cut the call. Noted down the points to speak with her. One about the marketing division, second about Dimple to help us out, third what is happening in Haryana.

Loveleen came after thirty-five minutes. I went with her to put Dhruv in Chitti care. Atul and Reena started playing with him by saying things children would say.

We came back and sat down. I have shown her the document prepared by Sunitha regarding our new division for marketing. I said this I would like to start with your firm. We want to help your company get more orders and we want a commission paid to us. We can also use this for adjusting our income tax payments. If you feel your firm is going above board in income tax payments we will give our bills to pay for the services of advertising. If our software firm has to pay more tax then we will not submit the bills and absorb the expenses to reduce our income tax. This way our companies can adjust income tax payments. I want this division to be headed by Sunitha, she is already looking after the Operations as Director and this division will be under her. You check this document and she is offering these services to the company.

Next, I have a situation with Sahithi. She seems to be duped by her Manager at her previous company. He has taken advantage of her and he did not help her. I want to teach him a lesson. Where is Dimple? She said she is in Delhi, helping the party. Can she come over here I asked? She said I don't think so, it will disrupt her work and if she is exposed to the news it might create problems for her work. I said then we will think about something else.

I asked So how is everything on the political front? Are there any problems? I think I am not needed for the next four years until the next elections. She said politics is always fluid. What happens next minute, no one knows. Keep in the loop. I asked when are you likely to come back to the work. She said I am going to leave the work to the duo of Sahithi and Nishitha. I said I think Nishitha and Kirit's engagement won't go forward. She asked why? It seems Nishitha's father had some reservations about his Kundali, he got them to perform some pujas also, but finally, he seems to have gone back on his word. I told Kirit to forget about Nishitha. It was my initiative to bring them together, Nishitha also follows her father's word. I don't think it will not have any effect on her performance.

So, if you are not going back to work with your firm, how about you contributing to our firm. For the time being advise Sunitha about her working on marketing your firm. Think about it, your presence is not needed full time. You can just supervise her for some time until she picks up the ropes. She said she will think about it.

Nikita came over to the library saying sorry for not coming yesterday. She said they had a fresher's party at her college. I said no problem, you could have just informed, Chitti would not wait for you to come. Next time just inform us. I introduced Nikita to Loveleen, she is Nikita is the daughter of Mr. D'Souza. I have appointed her to teach Chitti and to look after the kids. You can send Dhruv also. She is doing her final year degree, so I gave her this. Next year we will see where we can fit her. Loveleen nodded her head and said I am Loveleen, next-door neighbour and partner in this firm. She said glad to meet you, maam, I am going to the children's room and went away. Loveleen said she seems to be a nice girl. I said she seems to be. She got up I going to check on Dhruv and then go home, will see you later, I will let you know my decision.

I got up went out to the works going on for the gates. Satisfied with the work going as per my requirements, I lit a fag and went out of the gates to go to our office.

I saw Mr. D'Souza standing at the paan shop. I went over to him asked did you collect the visiting cards? He said no. I said then go and collect, go and meet Sunitha and she will give you the cards. You coordinate with her about the orders. We have some other work for you. You know about interior decoration work. He said he had the work done by them. You can also get the orders for them and you will get your commission. He said thanks I will go and collect the cards. Completing my fag, I threw it down and snubbed with my shoe.

I went over to my room prepared a cup of tea and sat down.

I checked the progress of the courier company application with Rajesh. He informed me that the application is ready. I said go with Mahira and test the application with them. He said ok. I said then what about the Hospital application? Are you coordinating with Nandini? He said he did not meet her. I said ok I will check with her. Called Mahira asked her did you deliver the documents? She said yes. I asked what did they said? She said nothing, they will study and let us know. I said ok, I will follow up on that.

I went over to Sunitha's room. I told her I had spoken to Loveleen about starting division with Sunitha and asked her to help her in the beginning and she said

she will think about it. Sunitha said what is the need for her? I said she knew her business and she is going to stay at home for some more time. I think she became complacent about working again. I thought this would be an ideal opportunity for her to come out again. After helping you out she will be back at her firm. Otherwise, she will become bored at home and might do something else.

Sunitha said it is ok for me to work with her. I said to keep what I said in mind while dealing with her. It is for her own good.

I came back to my room and sat down with a cup of tea. Rajesh is not taking over the hospital project, why? In the beginning, he did not start it and now he had completed the other project, not this one. I think I should not have passed it to him. I will take over the project. What Nandini is doing? He says he has not even met her. I got up and went to her room. She is sitting there and checking the application by entering the data. I asked her what is going on? She said I am entering data for Lab Reports, I am entering the master data. I asked so, how is the development going? She said I think it is going at a good pace. I asked how long it would take to complete? She said another two months. I asked when are your father planning for the start of the construction of the hospital? She said he says another three to six months, he says he had to finalize the details. I asked did you speak to him about my proposal for financial assistance. She said no, I did not get the chance to speak, maybe when I go there I will speak with him directly. I said see what you can do.

I came back to my room and started checking the status of the hospital application. I wanted it to be finished so that we can get more orders from other hospitals. We can ask Loveleen's father for getting the orders from their state hospitals. Nandini's father's hospital would take the application, but it might take some time to build. A doubt started creeping into my mind. Am I getting the marketing correct way from Mahira? To get the courier company account I had to prompt her to go and contact them. I think the best way would be for her is to let her do things on her own, I should shift her two salesmen from the marketing division. She would think I am giving priority to Sunitha, that's what I want. She should think her position is not freely available, she should earn it. But how should I tell her this? I think I should take a meeting and discuss the matter in a meeting. That way I can scuttle the responsibility from me. Let her go at it on her own, as she was doing it previously. She can take help as she was taking Kirit to visits. This way she should bring some results, if not I can revise this. I am new to this business, I have to be flexible in this, I can't be complacent

in my approach to the business needs and I need to improve things for the better. Completing my checking I prepared a document and sent it to the server.

I took the empty cup to the sink rinsed and put it back on the stand.

I got up and went over to the gates being erected. The gates are erected and they were set. It would take another day for them to be used.

I went out and went in through the main gate of the house. I checked in the children's room. Loveleen is still sitting there supervising the children playing. I asked surprisingly you did not go home? She said Dhruv is playing with Atul and Reena, he seems to be enjoying playing with them, so I let them play. I said I came over for lunch, do you want to have lunch with me. She said no thanks, I am thinking of going home, I could not separate them. I said then bring him in the evening they can play together or send him with a servant. She said I will do that and picked him up. He is adamant at first about going away with his mom, but she told something in his ear and calmed down and went with her mom. I said Nikita will you look after the kids, I will call Chitti. I went over to the dining hall, Chitti is bringing the dishes from the kitchen and placing them on the table. I told her to leave the dishes I will serve myself you go and be with Nikita, she is alone. Chitti went away to the children's room.

I served the dishes and started eating. Completing lunch, I went outside lit a fag and walked to the office.

I went over to Sunitha's office and told her to use the salesmen from Mahira. She said Mahira might object. I said to start using them by sending them to clients. You get potential clients from Loveleen and start using them. She said she will do that.

I went to Mahira's room. She is not there. She and Rajesh must have gone to the courier company for a demo and testing of the application.

I went to my room sat down in my chair, called the two developers to come to my room. When they came I asked for the status of the hospital project. I said I will continue to look after the project and Rajesh will be looking after the other project. I told them to speed up the project and if they need any support they can ask me. After completing this project, we have to look for selling this as a product. So, prepare the software where it will allow to be sold to any other client also. I gave them instructions to complete the project as soon as possible and sent them away.

I prepared a cup of tea and sat back in my seat.

Tomorrow we have to go to the doctor. What he will say about our problem, we have to see. Then if Mahira and Rajesh return, we have to plan for their training accordingly. Then I have to see what Loveleen says about my proposal.

I called Sunitha and asked her did Mr. D'Souza come to pick up the visiting cards. She said no. What is the problem with him? does he wants to work and earn something or not. He does not seem enthusiastic about doing our selling.

I took the car and went to Sunitha's flat. I took our balance clothes and personal items at the flat and put them in the car. I told the watchman that I am going out of the city and in my place another person will be staying and I will be paying the rent as usual. I went over to the factory and gave Kirit the keys to the flat and told him he can use the flat as he wants. I told the watchman you will be staying there. Get some personal items and you can keep them there. I have removed all our personal items. You can keep the keys and left the factory and went home. I took the bag and took it to my room removed my personal items from the bag put them away took the bag and put it in Sunitha's room.

I went over to Sunitha's office room and told her I have cleared our items from the flat and gave the keys to Kirit to use as he feels fit. I have put your things in your room.

I went to my room and sat down. Finding no work to do, I got up made myself a cup of tea and sat down. I have to find something new to create software or something to do. I am having more free time because I am delegating work now. Earlier I had to do all the work myself. Being the boss has some perks like this. I got up and went out lit a fag. Looked around the workers left after cleaning the area around the gate. Now the gate standing with the support of wooden planks. I went out to the road entered our house. I went and looked at the children's room. They are sound asleep. I went to my library and sat down. Switched on the tv and started watching a show on tv. She must have heard the sound of the tv, Chitti came over and asked Anna, do you want some tea. I said no, I just had. She went away. When we don't have any money, we get lot of ideas for business. When we have money to invest we don't get any ideas. I was breaking my head about what else I can do, no idea is coming up.

I laid my head on the table thinking for any ideas. I don't know when my eyes closed and I went into a slumber. I felt a touch on my shoulder and got up with a shudder. I looked around no one was present. Why did I get the touch on my shoulder when no one is around? I felt an urge to check on the children. I went over to their room and looked at the kids sleeping. Satisfied they are still there I sat on a sofa in the room.

Why have I the urge to check on them? Are they in any kind of danger? Is someone going to kidnap them? Why that terror in my heart? I called Chitti and told her to look after the kids went over to Loveleen's house. On the way, I warned the watchman to be careful of any newcomers and lock the back gate. The same warning, I gave to Loveleen's watchman and entered her house. The servant came over and said Loveleen's is in her room. I went over to her room. She is rocking Dhruv. I said I felt some danger to the children and checked they are sleeping and I thought about Dhruv and came over to check on him. She said I trying to rock him to sleep. I said be careful. I will see you later. I will check the grounds and go home. She said ok see you.

I made a round of the grounds of Loveleen's house and then went over to my house and there also made rounds of the ground and from there looked into the office grounds. Everything seemed alright. I went inside the house. Sahithi seemed just came over. She asked where are you coming from? I said I am looking over the outside, I felt some danger and was looking over the grounds. What kind of danger she asked? I said I don't know, I felt threatened, I thought it might be about kids, went and checked the kids and told Chitti to be with the kids.

I felt uneasy about the whole thing called the Shakha Pramukh and told him I have been feeling very uneasy about something and I could not put my finger on what is happening. I thought my kids were threatened and I could not find any source to my feelings. He said that a small girl was brought to him as her guardians were killed in an accident. She was told her parents have died and the old people were raising her in their village. Now they were coming to Bombay with her and they died in an accident. I asked what is the girls name. He said her name is Leena. We are trying to find who is their relatives here? I said I am coming over there don't send her with anyone. I am just coming.

I took my car drove as fast as possible to Vakola Shakha. I arrived in fifteen minutes. I entered the office and Leena is sitting on a bench at the side. I asked what happened. He said she had come to Bombay with two old people, they don't seem to be her parents. I suspect they might have kidnapped her. When no one came to claim the bodies, our people have taken up the cremation work and she was left alone and she was brought to me to see what we can do. I said until you find the details of her parents, I would like to keep her with us. We will take care of her. I caught hold of her hand and asked her Leena would you like to come to our house? When I caught her hand the uneasiness in me subsided and I felt a feeling of calm descent on me. I thought what I was feeling was about this girl only. It is my duty to look after the girl. I looked at the Shakha

Pramukh, he said if you are going to look after the girl you can take her with you. We will inform you of any further developments regarding her. I said thanks and took her came out. I sat her in the car and asked are you feeling hungry, did you have something to eat. She said the uncle had given to eat. I am not feeling hungry. I said let us go home and drove the car to our house.

I parked the car and took her inside the house. When Leena's eyes fell on Sahithi, she ran towards her calling her aayi and caught her at the legs. Sahithi seems to have felt a motherly feeling and caught her lifted and hugged her.

What is our relation to Leena, to have felt that strong emotions to bring her to safety? It seems she was in some kind of grave danger which made me go and bring her to safety. I told Chitti to take her to the children's room and look after her. Sahithi to see what she wants like clothes and food. She also went away. I sat down on the sofa. Sunitha just came over from the office and asked me what happened? I explained my feeling of anxiety and when I called Shakha Pramukh and he told me about the girl, I went over and brought over her here. She asked where is she? I said I sent her with Chitti to look after her.

I went over to the library sat down behind the table. Who is Leena? Why I was worried about her?

Sunitha came and sat opposite me. She asked why you were worried about the girl. I said I don't know but I had felt a touch on my shoulder and no one is around. From that minute I had felt a kind of anxiety and went checked on the kids, then went over and checked Dhruv. Still, the anxiety did not die down. Then I called Shakha Pramukh, he said he had a girl brought to him as her guardians have died in an accident, and their bodies were given to them for cremation as no one came to collect their bodies. He was thinking about what to do with the girl. I felt a need to get over there and check her out. I went there I told him I am going to look after her until someone comes claiming her. He said he will tell his people to canvas for the girl and also put advertisements. Let us see what comes out of that. Where is Sahithi? She is in the children's room. I asked how old she looks? She replied she seemed three years old, younger than Reena. She looks as if born into a good family not what the old people are. I feel she looks like Reena was two years ago. I said I felt the same. Let us check Reena's photos from her birthday two years back. I went over and brought their birthday album. See here she looks like Reena at her third birthday. Sunitha said but there seemed some differences. Reena looks South Indian, and Leena looks Maharashtrian. Reena looks like Sneha and Leena looks like Sahithi. I said exactly what you said.

Sahithi came over and asked what are you doing with the photo album. I said we are seeing the similarities between Leena and Reena. They look like sisters. Sunitha said but there is a difference also Reena looks like Sneha's daughter and Leena looks like your daughter. Just see this photo and Leena.

Sahithi took the album and went to check the similarities between the photo and Leena. We both looked at each other, what did that means?

I remembered tomorrow we had a consultation with the psychiatrist I called confirmed the time and date with the receptionist.

I went to Sahithi and said to her I had confirmed our consultation with the doctor for tomorrow. She nodded her head.

I said I will look after the kids you go and prepare dinner. I sat down on a chair and looked at the kids. The three of them are playing together. I asked Leena does she remember about her mother? She remembered her mother and grandmother. My Naanamma used to take me daily to play in the garden. I asked where was your mother when your Naanamma took you to play. She replied my mother used to work. She used to go daily to the office. I asked what was your mother's work do you know? She replied I don't know what she was working. I took a photo from the birthday party and showed her a group photo with my mother in it. I asked her can you recognize your Naanamma from this. She pointed to my mother in the photo. How is this possible she could recognize my mother from the photo? I asked do you remember what happened that they took you to these old people you were living with? She said I remember something like I was playing on the swing and someone came from behind and took me out of the building. That's all I remember. Then I remember I was with these old people and they said my parents were dead. They will look after me.

It seems she was taken away from her parents forcefully. Who are her parents? Why she is saying Sahithi as her mother and my mother as her grandmother. What is the mystery behind it?

I rang up Shakha Pramukh and explained the mystery we are facing. It can happen when she saw Sahithi and it can happen she might call her aayi, but how it is possible she would call my mother her grandmother that also in Telugu? He said he will make enquiries about the girl.

I sat there looking after the kids. Chitti came over to take the children for their dinner. I went over to Library. I looked over the collection of books. I don't think I have any books which will explain what happened with Leena. I sat down on

my chair. On a whim, I got up and went to the dining room. The children have finished their dinner and asked Sahithi to bring Leena with her I want to go to my parent's place. She asked at this time? I said I have to check something with them about Leena. Three of us went to my parents flat. I rang the bell and my father opened the door and asked surprisingly what are you doing at this time? I said please let me come in, where is mummy? She is in the kitchen about to serve dinner. She came out of the kitchen, Leena ran to her saying Naanamma, meaning grandmother. She caught her took her to the sofa and sat down. She asked who is this? I said she is Leena and she is saying you are her grandmother and see what she called you? My mother sat her in her lap and asked who am I? she said you are my Naanamma, take me to play on the swing. My mother said it became late we will go tomorrow. She asked me what is this? I said that's what I want to know. She is recognizing Sahithi as aayi and you as Naanamma. She did not call me anything but she does not fear me or scared of me. I asked her who am I? She said daddy. See this, I have not asked her this before. She is recognizing all our family members. Do you have some photos of Sneha? She said they are in the cupboard. You open that cupboard and remove them. I removed the album showed her Sneha's photo and asked her who is this? She said I don't know. See she is not even recognizing Sneha, if she recognized her she would have called her amma as other kids. She is behaving as if she stayed here for a long time. She even told me she was abducted from the swing while playing. It is all seemed mysterious to me. I got up and said ok then I am going back, kids would be waiting for Sahithi. my mother said leave her here for some time. Let us see how she behaves when I take her to the park tomorrow. I said ok if you can look after her for a few days, I will leave her here. If you have any problem let me know I will come and pick her up. I asked Leena can you stay here? She said I can stay with Naanamma. We came down sat in the car drove back to the house.

I finished lunch went to the library and sat down. It seems the mystery would not be solved any time soon. I took a book from the shelf and started reading it.

I looked at the watch, it is showing 10 pm. I got up and went over to the bedroom. I changed into a nightdress and lay on the bed. She is sleeping facing the other side. I lay facing the ceiling and thinking about Leena. Has God given her Leena because she has fear of childbirth? Has she realized that? She turned towards me and asked what is this about Leena? I can't understand. I said Leena is your daughter. She is recognizing you and my mother as if you both have raised her. She does not recognize Sneha, which means she doesn't know

Sneha. I myself could not understand the meaning of that. I don't know how this is possible. Sleep it off we will see tomorrow.

The next day we went over to visit the doctor. The doctor gave Sahithi some medicines and sleeping pills to reduce anxiety. I have discussed Leena's case with him but he could not give any insights into that. He said to come after 15 days for review. On the way back, we visited our parent's place. Leena is moving around the house as if she is living there for some time. It is surprising that she did not act as if she is at someone else place at all. We spent there some time there and we returned to our house.

Nishitha was waiting for Sahithi and they both went away to their office.

I sat at my office reviewed the progress of the work. Mahira and Rajesh were working with the courier company, they came to the office and went together to the courier company. They left a message that they would be working with them today also. I thought one work is completed.

I called Nandini and the two developers for the review of the works. I asked for their names as I did not get their names. One is Upendra and the other is Sawant. I asked then what is pending from the details given by Nandini. We had a meeting for an hour and I told them to work on the details of the modifications worked out. I asked Nandini how the work is going on building the hospital? She said they have acquired the land required for the building and would be starting the work after checking with their guru, who would fix a mahurat for laying the foundation stone. I asked are they inviting anyone for the foundation stone laying ceremony? She said if you like to visit Hyderabad then I will fix the tour with my father. I said you do that. I would like to visit the site and see the plans for the hospital. Shakha Pramukh is saying they also want to build a hospital for the poor here in Bombay. She said it is commendable they want to build a hospital for the poor, but ours is not for the poor. I said I know that if your father can help in the building they will pay the consultation fees. There won't be a problem on that front. They are also offering financial help in your hospital also. She said I will check the date and inform you. I said thanks and she went away.

I went out lit a fag and looked at the workers working on the gate. They were making some plastering on the side where they broke the wall. I went over to my house and asked Chitti to get me a tea and went over to the library.

I looked at the science and technology books. Which book can have some answers for me?

I put some books on my table and looked at their summary.

Chitti brought a cup of tea and placed it on my table. I asked what the kids are doing? She said Loveleen came with Dhruv and they are playing. I asked Loveleen came over? She said yes. I said ok you can go back to your work.

Finding nothing in the books I placed them back on the rack and went over to the kid's room. I sat with her looked at the kids playing. She asked I was told you brought a small girl home yesterday? I said yes. Her guardians were dead in an accident and Shakha Pramukh was looking for someone to look after her. The mystery was when I brought her home she went to Sahithi calling her aayi. And the most surprising part is she recognized my mother as her grandmother and even called her Naanamma that is paternal grandmother in my language. When I took her to my parent's place she was asking my mother to take her to play on swings in the colony park. I left her there for some time to see her reaction when she meets the neighbours. Loveleen asked was she sent after coaching by anyone? I said I don't think so. Her reaction was genuine. She recognized me as daddy but she acted as if I don't have much interaction with her. She behaved as if she is being raised by my mother. She acted as if she came from another universe.

When I said that word another universe, was I talking from my book knowledge? That kind of thing is even possible? Where could I have read about it?

Loveleen asked where you went away, to a different universe? I said when I said another universe, my thoughts went to the books I have read about time travel and multiple universes. Could it be possible that she was really Sahithi's daughter and also, she was talking about getting abducted from the swing at our parent's place? Was she staying at my parent's place and being raised by my mother. What if she is from the future? Loveleen said I don't know if the time travel exists in the future when she is three years old. You told me that Sahithi is scared of giving birth. Is it possible she would have a girl in the future? I said I don't know anything at this moment. Everything about her is a blur. We were not even sleeping together after Sneha's death. We even visited a psychologist for that. Loveleen asked when did you go? I said two days back and today also. She asked what the doctor said. I said first she was not ready to acknowledge she had a problem. When I said I am having problems sleeping with her she came out with a shocking story. I did ask you about dimple to help us out. she said you told me about teaching someone a lesson. I said that is what I am referring to when she was working in the typing pool, she tried to get

out of the pool by asking one of the manager's help. Instead of helping her, he took advantage of her and he told other managers not to help her. That is the reason she was depressed and I thought she was feeling guilty about Sneha's death. However, you gave her another life by giving her a job with you. We would always be grateful for that. Loveleen said you have returned that many times over, I should be grateful for that. You gave me a good manager in her, I better say partner. She is looking after the firm as her own. I don't have to think about day to day operations. Nishitha is also giving her good support. I can now concentrate on other things. I asked are you thinking of going over to Delhi. She said not that. I am waiting for Dhruv to be a little older, then I can think of other activities. I asked do you want more children or you want to stop with Dhruv? She said Dhruv is enough for me. I have not thought of any other kids. Now he has two elder brothers to look up to. I hope they will grow up like siblings. I said I am sure we can raise them like siblings. See how they play with each other. They both look at him like a younger brother.

Chitti came over and said anna, lunch is ready shall I serve? I asked Loveleen do you want to stay for lunch? Loveleen asked Chitti what are you serving? Hearing what she prepared she said I will stay for lunch. I asked who will look after the kids. Chitti said Nikita is coming over, she will look after the kids. I said we will wait until she comes over.

I called Kirit and said I want a dog. He asked you want a dog, What for? I said I want to raise them. It will be security around here. He said Krishna is asking which breed do you want? I said anything that looks fierce. Krishna must have taken the phone, he said my friend Ravindra's sister they have some puppies. I said I want a male and a female. He said they stay at Air India colony, Kalina. I will speak with him and let you know. I asked does he have a phone number. He has, I will call him and let you know. I cut the call. Loveleen asked you want to raise the dogs. From yesterday I was having a panic over kids. I wanted to have dogs in the house for the security of the kids. We don't be always in the house and we are leaving everything on Chitti. She not only looks after the kids, she makes lunch and looks after the house also. We have a cleaning crew for the office and house. I think we should have permanent staff for these works. The phone rang and I lifted the receiver and said hello. Krishna on the other side said hello, they have days old puppies. I asked what breed. They are Great Dane, original breed. I asked can I go and get them? I will give you their address, you go and check. I noted down the address. I said I will go there after lunch, and cut the call.

Nikita came over with a box in hand. I asked what did you bring? She said my father sent you this snail curry. I said snail curry, I never had it before. She said try it is very tasty. I took the box said thanks. You look after the kids, we will have lunch and come. Did you have your lunch? She said I just had and came.

I gave the box to Chitti said Nikita brought it. She asked what is it? I said snail curry, let us try. I tried the curry with rice. It is very tasty. I said Loveleen you also try it, it is very tasty. Mr. D'Souza said his wife is an excellent cook. It is really very tasty. She tried and said yes, it is very tasty. If we are having a party we should ask her to cook seafood for us. I said yes.

We completed our lunch and came to the children's room. I said Nikita, your mom is an excellent cook, I never had that tasty seafood before. She said thanks. I am going to Kalina to get us some dogs. Loveleen said I am also coming with you. Can you look after Dhruv? She said no problem, Chitti will also be there.

We took the car and reached the address given by Krishna. He had a litter of puppies. I said I want a male and a female. We selected one blue male and one black female. He said the price is eight thousand. It is my side business. We paid and took the puppies and reached home. I named them Sonu, Monu. The Male is Sonu and the other one is Monu. Seeing the puppies, the kids were very happy.

I told Chitti for the time being put them on the ground floor. We will provide a room for them. First, we need to send them for training. For the time being I told them to be put in a box.

I went over to the office and started looking after the pending works.

I worked until 5:30 and got up made myself a cup of tea and took it the outside and lit a fag. I felt like someone is watching me. I looked around there is no place someone could hide and watch us. Finishing my fag, I went inside. Shutdown the system and closed the room, I came out and went to my house through the newly installed gate.

After having dinner, I went to the library went through some books. I came back to the bedroom. Sahithi is preparing for sleeping. I asked her did she take the medicines given by the doctor. She said she did not take the sleeping pills. I said you should take all the medicines given by the doctor. She took the tablet and lay on the bed. She turned towards me asked why did you get the dogs. I said they are for security. Now they are very little. Wait for six months they will be

ferocious. We can leave them in the night outside they will make rounds around the building. The sleeping pill must be working, she is slowly going to sleep. I waited until her breathing is even I got up and went to Sunitha room. I turned the doorknob, it did not turn, it must be locked from inside. I knocked very lightly. She opened the door and said you are at this time. I said Sahithi gone to sleep. So, I came over to you. We have not been together for some time. She locked the door behind and we went to the bed. After half an hour I dressed up and went back to my room. Sahithi is sleeping soundly. I got beside her and went to sleep.

Chapter 12

Kumar

It is three months since I got the puppies. They are running all around the three properties. I keep the gates open so they will be accustomed to the grounds around our house.

Mahira and Rajesh completed the courier company project. Hospital project is coming to an end. Nandini invited us to Hyderabad for the foundation laying ceremony for the building of the hospital which will be next Monday. I have asked Sahithi to accompany me to Hyderabad. She declined as she got to finish up a project with a big client. She did not have any free time.

I asked Sunitha to come with me to Hyderabad. She said what Sahithi would think if I came with you to Hyderabad. I said to Nandini I would be coming to Hyderabad alone. Nandini said she will come with me to Hyderabad. So, I booked two tickets to Hyderabad by first flight on Sunday morning. I thought I'll have some time with her father before the bhoomi pooja.

On Sunday morning we caught the flight at Santacruz airport. We landed in Hyderabad. Nandini said her father told her he would send the car. She was looking around for the driver. Instead she found her cousin Rohan. She went and hugged him and asked how come you have come to pick me up. He said I came to see you, after a long time I am seeing you. She introduced Rohan to me. I said glad to meet you. He said I heard a lot from Nandini about you. I looked at her what you told him about me. He said all good things about you. He said let us go. We got in the car. She sat beside him and continuously talking. He took us to their bungalow at Jubilee hills. There were few houses far between. I said this area seems pretty isolated. He said don't think like that. The lands around us were brought by VIP's. This is an upcoming area. I said looking at the bungalow, nice looking building. She said it is nice, but not like you have in Bombay. Rohan looked at her as if this is not a good building. She said he had two bungalows in the Juhu area, facing sea and beach side. Rohan asked what do you do with two bungalows. I said I use one for our office and another for residential purposes. She said excitedly he also got two Great Dane dogs. Now they are three months old and he is thinking about sending them to training. He lets them wander the three properties. Rohan asked what third property. She said the third property belongs to their partner. She stays in the third building beside. We entered the house and I was given a guest room. I put my luggage in the room and came and sat on the hall. Nandini's father Subba Rao came and

greeted me. He explained me how the building has been planned and showed me the plans. He said Nandini has lot of input in planning the building. Her studies have come to some use here. He asked me how the kids are. I said they doing fine.

We sat down and he was asking me questions about my background and I was answering him. This went on for over an hour.

Cutting short the questioning he asked to come for lunch. We all went to the dining hall. We had our lunch silently. He must be of the opinion that one should not speak while eating. We completed our lunch came back to the hall. I said I will be back in a minute and came out to the outside for a fag. Behind me Nandini and Rohan came over. I lit a fag and Rohan took one from me and I lit his. We smoked in silence. I asked him where you are working now. He said he is working with a hospital. It is his dream to have own hospital. I asked him how long it will take to build the hospital. He replied at conservative estimates it should take nine months to a year. I asked so can we expect to start the hospital by the next year end? He said I think so, it might take a little longer to get all the equipment. I said so by 1995 you should be starting the operations. He said I hope so. We completed our fags went inside the house.

Nandini proposed we should go watch a movie. She asked me are you comfortable watching a Telugu movie. I said I am comfortable watching any language movie. I have not watched any Telugu movie for a long time. I think I last watched a Telegu movie in a theatre was when I was in intermediate college that was with Sneha. Somehow one way or other I always remember Sneha. Seeing my eyes Nandini got up let us go now otherwise we may miss the starting of the movie. We went over to the theatre, there was a movie Mayalodu starring Rajendra Prasad. Rohan went and got us three tickets and we went and sat in the theatre. Nandini sat between the two of us. Throughout the picture she was giving me running commentary about Rajendra Prasad and the movie. After coming out she asked me how the movie was. I said excellent. I hardly watched the movie what with her running commentary.

Rohan took us to a restaurant. He asked me what you would have. I said just tea. Nandini ordered dosa for both of them. I sat there sipping my tea while they had dosa. Completing dosa she ordered ice cream. I said I will wait outside and came out and lit a fag.

After five minutes they came out of the restaurant. Rohan asked why you came out. I said for a fag. We went to the car and rode back to her house. He left us

there and went away citing some work. It is a great thing for him to spend so much time with us with his busy work schedules.

She sat me in the hall went to her room saying she will change and come. Subba Rao came over and sat down. From his questioning he must be evaluating me. Now he changed his questioning to general topics and then to politics. He was asking why the Telugu Desam has failed in these elections. I said I have not been following the Andhra politics, but I know for sure Sena will come into power in the next elections. He asked how I would know that. I said we are analyzing the current trends in the state. Now the Sena has an edge. After the bomb blasts the congress in the state has weakened. There is a small achievement to be obtained by getting some Muslim votes, which will turn the tide in their favour. He asked how they can achieve that. I said they have to give assurances to the Muslims that in their ruling no such incidents will happen. He asked can they do that? I said it is possible from the level of Shakhas only. They have already started building up for their next elections. He asked can Telugu Desam can come back to power? I said I don't know I have to study the last election results and the trends of the ruling party to come to a conclusion. He asked how do you study? I said I got a computer program for that. I have to feed the data and I have to give it some variables to come to different scenarios. From the scenarios I make conclusions and make some recommendations to the party. He asked did you do the same in the Haryana elections. I said we were lucky there. We had a breakthrough before the elections in an operation. We want to trap someone and someone else got in the trap. A minister had to resign on this and we got a boost in the elections. Using the software for the first time I made some observations and we got good results. He said why I am asking about this is because we have to think about who will win next elections based on the party will be in power we have to make investments. I said sometimes it is really difficult to understand the sentiments of the people. Take for example when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated the party was on the way to lose elections. But they have won on sympathy votes in those elections. They know he will not be Prime Minister but they still voted for his party. It always happens in the elections. You need a strong party at the center. A weak party at the center brings the country to its knees. The PM needs to take tough decisions with regards to foreign policy especially. Take for case of Pakistan, it is rumored that China is helping Pakistan in creating a Nuclear Bomb. If it is successful then what will be the position of India. They can threaten us with nuclear bombs, and then we should be ready with our own bombs. So, the PM has to make his decision on nuclear matters. Those countries that have nuclear capability, they threaten us not to go for nuclear capability fearing for their survival in the open market.

That is why we need strong party and strong PM. Subba Rao said you seemed to have a good grasp of the political situation of the country. I said I read a lot and keep up with the news. He asked how come you have entered this software field. I said I think it is my destiny to come to software field. That is all I can say about that. Nandini came over to us and said you seemed to be discussing something seriously? He said we are looking at political prospects for the next elections. These governments do hardly anything for the people. They always look for their commissions in everything. That makes the projects unviable for the developers and makes a mess of everything. Nandini said come we will go and sit outside. I got up thanked Mr. Subba Rao for the discussions and went with Nandini outside. She said I thought you were getting bored with the discussions. I said I am not getting bored but I wanted a fag so I came out with you and lit a fag and took a drag. We went and sat on a bench. After finishing the fag, I said I wanted to change and got up. She said I will drop to your room. We went towards the guest room. On the way I said pointing to a room is this your room? She said yes, how do you know. I said I don't know I just assumed. She said come I will show you the room. She opened the door and we went inside. After entering the room, I had kind of déjà vu. I felt I came into this room previously and spend some time there with Nandini. I looked at Nandini she asked how is my room? I looked at the bed. I felt I had shared the bed with Nandini thinking about that I felt aroused. I pushed down the feelings came out of the room and went to my room at a brisk pace. She came behind me asked what happened. I said I had a weird feeling when I entered your room. She asked what weird feeling. I turned my head to the other side and said I felt like we spent some time on that bed. I must have dreamt about it. I can't understand how that is possible, this is the first time I came to your house and that is the first time I entered your room. She said don't worry about that and kissed me on the cheek and went away. I sat down on the bed thinking what just happened.

I opened my bag for the dresses and found two books. I removed the books put them on the night stand. Removed a change of dress, put them on the bed and went to the attached bathroom. Had bath came out and dressed up and went to the hall. As I was about to sit down, Rohan came over and sat down. He said sorry, had to check with a patient. I said it's ok. Nandini came over after five minutes and asked Rohan where we shall go for dinner. He said you tell. I heard there is a new restaurant near Jubilee Hills check post. I looked at the time it is around 7:30. Nandini said I will get ready and come and went to her room. She came after 8 pm. We went by the car to the restaurant mentioned by Nandini. We sat down and we ordered drinks. Rohan and I had two pegs each. Rohan

said don't worry Nandini will drive us back. After completing our drinks, we ordered dinner. Completing our dinner, we went back to Nandini's house driven by Nandini.

I went to my room changed and sat on the bed. I looked at the night stand, choose one book started reading. It is a book 'You can say that again' by James Hadley Chase. The hero in this story was asked to impersonate a billionaire. When he was given an injection and he lose conscience, then the door of my room was knocked on by someone. I put the book aside and went and opened the door. Nandini is standing outside the door in her nightwear. I went back to the bed and sat down. She closed the door, came and sat on a chair opposite to me. I looked at her. She asked what are you doing? I said I am reading a book. She asked what book? I gave her the book marking the point I was reading. She looked at the cover and asked what kind of book is this. I said you don't seem to read much, it is a mystery novel. She said ok, what you were telling in the evening, when you visited my room. I said I felt like I was in your room before and we have spent some time on your bed. She said then come we will spend some time there. I said I also felt that did not end well for me. She asked what do you mean? I said you left me heartbroken. It took me a long time come out of that.

She asked why you fear heartbreak, enjoy while you can. I said you know when Sneha went away I was heartbroken, and then Sahithi brought me back. Now I don't know if she can bring me back or not, she herself is in a bad shape. I don't know if I can come back from further breakdowns. She asked then why did you keep a relationship with Sunitha? I said our relationship is based on no expectations from each other. We don't expect anything from each other except physical relation. We understand each other. I know from the time I have seen her, I know what is in her mind and she knows what is in my mind. The only time we had a misunderstanding is about Mahira. She thought I was having sex with her instead it was Kirit. When I made understand that, she was back to normal. Even though we stay in the same house, we can keep our distance. Can you not become jealous? I know what will come between us is only jealousy, nothing else. I can see in your eyes that jealousy is the only thing that is a wall between us. She said I will give my promise I will never leave you and go away. I said then let us keep our relations to the professional level only. We will see what happens in the future. I know we have to work together for a long time. Let us not spoil our relations with keeping physical relations. She said I will give you some time think it over. Good night and went out closing the door behind her. I

resumed reading the book. I read for some time and when I felt asleep I put the book aside and switched off the lights and went to sleep.

Nandini

When I showed Kumar my room, instead of looking over the room and telling me how I have decorated my room, he ran out of the room to his room. His behavior was puzzling after that. It seems he had a dream about us having shared the bed. I looked him over he seems to hide his arousal he got from thinking about the dream. Then why is he acting like that, if he had any feelings about me he could express them, I never had previously objected to him on any matter. During the flight, I caught his hand most of the flight. Then suddenly what happened to him. From his words, it seems he is fearing heartbreak. He was telling once his wife left him and he was saved by Sahithi. Then when she died it was Sahithi who supported him. From his words, it seems he is thinking she would not support him anymore. I feel it was not that I am going to give him heartbreak, it's his feeling Sahithi may not support him. I must make him feel that I would support him whatever the situation. I went inside the room sat down on my bed with my back to the headboard. My mother came inside the room asked what are you doing in his room? I said I just went to see if is comfortable or not. She said what is the need to check on him. I said you don't know him, in his office he gave me my own room. He made sure I have everything I require there. If he wanted he would have told me to work from the hospital. Or told me to sit with the developers. What is the need to give me my own room? He looks after me like his other partners. She said ok, ok you can check on him. Go to sleep, we have to get up early in the morning.

Kumar

I heard the knock on the door and got up and went and opened the door. It is Nandini get ready and come we have to go. I said I am coming in 10 minutes. Went and had a quick bath changed and went down. Nandini came with two cups of coffee in her hand. She is already dressed up and ready to go. I took the cup from her and started sipping. She finished the coffee took my cup went to the kitchen. She came back asked do you want breakfast? I said there is no urgency for it, I just had the coffee. Rohan came and urged us to come we have to go. I got up and Nandini and I went with Rohan to the car. I asked no one else is coming with us? He said we three are only left to go, they have already left. We went over to the hospital land. Already the arrangements were made for the puja. We went and stood a little behind. The purohit started performing rituals of bhoomi puja. After completing the puja, we returned to the house.

Nandini said let us have breakfast. We went to the dining hall had our breakfast and tea and came back to the hall. Someone switched on the tv and changed the channel to the news. News must have just started after reading the highlights, the newsreader started reading the main news. She read in a shocking turn of events in Delhi, Haryana CM's son-in-law, Gurvinder Singh was murdered in broad daylight a few hours back. While he was coming out of his house, someone stopped his car in front of his house and put two bullets in his head. He was declared dead there. He was taken to hospital for post mortem. There was news about many people expressing shock over his murder. Someone claimed it must be the act of some business rivals. I called Loveleen at her house. I told her I just watched the news on the tv. Is it true? She said She just learned about his death. I asked what are you going to do? She said I reluctantly had to go there and check his affairs. You take the first flight and come over to Delhi. I will be leaving with Dhruv now. I said I am starting now and cradled the phone. Nandini standing beside me listening to me asked do you need to go anywhere? I said I had to go to Delhi. She asked why? What happened. I said Loveleen's husband was murdered in Delhi. She exclaimed Loveleen's husband murdered? I said yes. She asked so, you are going to Delhi to be with her. I said it is not that, she had to get her affairs in order. It is not business rivalry that killed him, it is the political rivalry. She asked me to be there, so I had to go there. Can you get any travel agents to get me tickets? She said I am also coming with you. I said what will you do there? She said I want to be there with you. I said ok see about the tickets, take my card and get the tickets. She called the agent and asked him to get two tickets to Delhi. I got up went to my room packed the bag and kept it ready for traveling. Nandini came over said she got tickets for Delhi, I am packing and coming over in five minutes we have to leave in 10 minutes. I said I am ready showing my packed bag. I informed Loveleen about the time of our flight. She said she is also leaving now to the airport.

We went to the airport collected the tickets went inside checked in and waited for the gate call. Nandini asked what is your real relationship with Loveleen? I said she is a partner in our firm. She asked is it the only relationship you have with her? I said I treat her like my friend. She depends on me for support. Her family also support us financially, otherwise, I could not have started the firm. She said so, you are saying you do not have physical relation with her. I said I have never imagined having a physical relationship with her. I have always kept her at arm's length. We never had a intimate relationship with her. I never imagined it like that with her. I said except with Sunitha, I never had a relationship with anyone else. She asked can I believe you? I said if you want me

to promise on anyone I can promise it. She said there is no need for promises. Your word is enough for me. The only thing I could not understand is your relation with her. I said some things can't be understood, like our relationship. What is our relationship, you tell me? She said I think we are friends. In the meantime, the gates were opened and boarding is announced. We got up showed our boarding passes went inside the aircraft, sat down at our seats. She linked her hand in mine and sat. I did not find any reason to object to that. When the lunch kart came she unlinked her hand collected the lunch and started eating. I ate my lunch and handed over the remains when the air hostess came to collect them. We reached Delhi collected our baggage and came out. There standing Vishal our driver from Delhi flat. Seeing me he waived. I went over to him and asked how come you are here. He said madam called me, she said you are also coming if you reach first told me tell you to wait for her. I handed him the luggage said put them in the car we will wait for her here. We looked at the board for incoming flights. Then next flight from Bombay would land in 30 minutes. We sat down on the seats waited for the flight to arrive.

When Loveleen came over she looked at Nandini, as why did she come with me. She handed her luggage to Vishal and said first drop me at my parent's place then take them to the flat. When she got down she said I will give you a ring when she gets time and went inside the house. Vishal drove us to the flat.

We went inside the flat, it was left as we saw the last time. Vishal must be keeping the flat clean. We took our bags and put them in the bedroom. We did not even settle down, the phone rang, it is Loveleen she said to be at Guru's house in half an hour, wait outside the gate. I said ok and I informed Vishal about going to Guru's house. We went over to Guru's bungalow and waited outside the gate. When the watchman enquired Vishal told him that we are waiting for Loveleen madam to arrive. Hearing Loveleen's name he went back to his seat. After about five minutes Loveleen arrived with Dhruv. I picked him up from her. She had a stern face on and we went inside with her. It seems the hall is filled with Guru's relatives. Guru's body is placed on a pedestal in the center of the room. People were coming and placing their flower garlands on his body. We stood aside and she went and stood beside his head. She had put on a veil on her head and she kept looking at the floor. Someone asked for the baby and I handed him and they touched him on his foot for paying respects and handed him to me. In the meantime, Vishal went and brought a garland and I placed it on his body on behalf of Loveleen. Someone from CM's office came with a garland and placed it on him. After finishing the formalities, they took the body in a van. I took Dhruv and went with the van to the crematorium. On behalf of

Dhruv, someone performed the required ceremonies touching the things to Dhruv for effect. Finally, the pyre is lit. We waited for some time for the fire to engulf the body of Guru. I took Dhruv and came out of the crematorium. Vishal is waiting in the car. I sat in the car back at Guru's house. I handed Dhruv to Loveleen, she took him inside a room possibly for feeding him. I looked at Nandini to be with her. Nandini went behind her into the room. I sat down in one of the chairs placed. They are placing a photo of Guru and lit a lamp in front of it. Someone is making arrangements for people to sit in front of the photo. I sat at a side and watched the goings on. After sometime people started coming and sitting in front of the photo. Loveleen came out and sat at the head of the group. Nandini brought Dhruv gave him to me to hold. I put him on my shoulder rocked him to sleep. Someone arranged eatable at a side. I went and asked to pour a tea for me. I picked the tea cup and went and sat down on a chair. Put the cup aside, put Dhruv in my lap, picked the cup and sipped my tea.

I looked at the time it is nearing 8 pm, still people are coming sitting in front of his photo, paying their respects and going away. I looked at Loveleen, she is playing the role of crying new widow brilliantly. I know she does not have any feelings for him. But in front of all these people she had to act her part. Nandini came and took Dhruv from me and handed him to Loveleen. I got up and went out for a smoke.

Vishal came over said the watchman was asking about you two. I asked what did you say? He said I told him you are madam's secretary and PA. Is it ok? I said it is ok, whatever you say. We are not bothered about that. He asked what is your actual position with her? I gave him my card and said she is our partner in the firm. He said surprisingly you are an MD of the firm and you are acting like this. I said I treat her as a friend and we do anything for friends. Don't tell anyone else about this here. Let them think we are working for her. He said ok and went away.

I went inside, now Dhruv woke from sleep, Loveleen gave Dhruv to Nandini got up and took him, and went to the same room. I told Nandini to take something for her to eat there. She took a plate placed some eatables on it and took it the room Loveleen entered. I myself took a plate placed small quantity of eatables went to a side to eat.

Nandini came over and said Loveleen told us to go back to the flat, someone from her family had come to be with her. She said to come tomorrow after 11. I asked did she need the car or driver? She said to take him with us. She won't need the car. I said then inform her we are going to the flat. I went out in search

of Vishal. I told him we are going back to the flat. When Nandini came I asked her did you have something to eat. She said I just had something. Let us go. We went to the flat. I took Vishal's help in separating the single beds. I went and had a bath came back and choose a bed and sat down on the bed. Vishal came over asked do you need anything? I said give me a cup of tea. Nandini said one cup for me also. Vishal said he will prepare the tea went to the kitchen. I came back to the hall sat down on the sofa lit a fag. Vishal brought three cups of tea and placed them on the table. I shouted Nandini come and have your tea. She shouted back I am coming. Vishal took a fag from the pack lit it.

Nandini came picked a cup went back to the bedroom. I asked Vishal what were you doing all these days? He said looking after this flat, running some errands, like that. I said you are keeping the flat clean from the looks of it.

Finished my fag and tea and went back to my bed.

I picked the book I was reading the other day and continued reading.

I don't know when I slipped into sleep when I got up it is 6:30 in the morning. I got up went to the bathroom brushed and went into the kitchen. Made three cups of coffee put one on the table beside the sofa woke Vishal to have coffee and took the other two cups into the bedroom. Put the cups on the nightstand woke Nandini to have coffee picked a cup went back to the hall. I lit a fag started sipping my coffee. I got up went to the bedroom, Nandini had coffee and went back to sleep. I picked a towel went for a bath. Completing the bath dressed and came to the hall. I asked Vishal what about our breakfast. He said I will go and pick something. He went away.

I went and woke up Nandini saying Vishal is getting breakfast, get up and have a bath. She got up reluctantly saying let me sleep for some time. I said if you want to sleep you got a whole day for that. Did you come with me to sleep or what? She took a towel went over to the bathroom. I came back sat on the sofa, waiting for Vishal to bring breakfast. Nandini came after fifteen minutes and sat beside me. I asked her are you feeling bored here? She said not bored little cold here, we did not bring out hot clothes for this season. I said while going to Guru's house we will get something on the way to wear. Cold has not picked up yet, it will be colder. When Vishal brought the breakfast we finished and readied to go to Guru's house. I told Vishal to take us to the cloth market. I asked Nandini what she would have, a sweater or a jacket? She said a jacket would be good. We brought a sweater and jacket for her. We went over to Guru's house. Loveleen gave me Dhruv to take to the crematorium for collecting ashes. We went and I stood aside with Dhruv and they collected the ashes and we

returned home. I handed over Dhruv to Nandini to be handed over to Loveleen. She handed him and came back. I asked her in a whisper what is happening? She said there was some talk about Guru's inheritance. After they publicly announced the pregnancy last year, no one has the guts to raise their voice. Only they are whispering about Dhruv getting his father's share. I think Loveleen only came here to see that Dhruv gets his share in the property. I said I also think the same. I don't really know his family details if he had any siblings, or who else may be sharing his father's inheritance. After coming to Delhi, I did not get a chance to speak with Loveleen, ask her to give me five minutes. Nandini said she will tell her and went away. I went and sat in the car with Vishal. He asked for a fag, I gave him one and lit myself one. How long we have to stay here? Do we have to wait until Loveleen's matters have to be fixed? I don't know what is Guru's worth. Should be substantial. His bungalow itself should be worth a lot of money. Why should she let go of them after suffering so much because of him? If not for herself, she would fight for Dhruv's sake. Her family would support her in this matter. Nandini came I was looking for you all over, you were sitting here. I said what is the matter? Loveleen said we return to the flat, she will give us a ring when we are required. I asked can we leave now? She sat in the car and said let us go. Vishal started the car drove us to the flat. We got down and sat down on the sofa. Vishal went out saying he will bring us lunch. I remembered I have not made a call to Bombay, first called Sahithi and asked how everything is going on there. She said everything is fine. When are you coming back? I said it is not certain. I will let you know when I am returning. Next, I called the office and spoke to Sunitha. I checked with her about her work. Then asked her to check what the developers are doing. As Nandini is also not there, check if they are working or not. I will let her know when I will be back and cut the call. I asked shall we go on a tour of the city? Last time I had come with Dimple we had made a tour of the city. Nandini did not have the tour. She said let us go. I asked Vishal to show Delhi. We came back after 8 pm. I asked Nandini how is the trip. It is good, when shall we go to see the Taj Mahal. I said soon. When we find suitable time, we will go and visit. Vishal went away to bring dinner.

I had a bath, wore a nightdress and had dinner, and lay on the bed with my book. I hoped to finish the book today. I don't know when I went to sleep reading the book. In the middle of the night, I woke from sleep. Nandini is sleeping beside me she put her hand on me, that must be the reason I woke up. I turned to the other side and went back to sleep. When I woke up Nandini is sleeping in her own bed. I thought about the middle of the night and it must be a dream.

I sat down on the sofa with a coffee and a fag. Must be the smell of the fag, Vishal got up and asked for a fag. I gave him one and lit it. I asked him will the madam will call us today? He said I don't think she will have any work for us. Her family members will look after her affairs. When she gets the affairs on her hand, she may ask for help. I said I thought so.

Finishing my coffee, I went to the bedroom awoke Nandini by saying get up we will go visit Taj Mahal today. She said yeh Taj mahal! and got up and went over to the bathroom.

When she returned from the bathroom I went for a bath and dressed came and sat in the hall. Vishal already brought breakfast. Completed breakfast I prepared tea and brought three cups to the hall and placed them on the table. I picked a cup sat on the sofa. Completing her bath Nandini came after dressing. I told her to have breakfast and be ready. We went over to Agra spent the whole day there and returned after having our dinner in a restaurant. I had a bath dressed and lay on the bed with a book. I drifted off to sleep. I woke up in the middle of the night. Nandini was sleeping beside me turning to the other side. I woke her and told her to go her bed.

We spend the next week like this, daily visiting the places near Delhi. We left in the morning and came back in the night. With the help of Vishal Nandini got the beds attached. Still, I kept my physical distance from her. If she expected anything from me she must be disappointed.

In the morning I prepared three cups of coffee and gave one to Vishal and took the other two to the bedroom. Woke up Nandini to take the coffee. I asked her where shall we go today. She said we will ask Vishal. I came out to ask Vishal, then the doorbell rang. I went and opened the door. It was Loveleen's family driver. He asked me to come with him. It must mean for me to come alone. I told him to wait in the hall, went over to take bath. I dressed and had breakfast and went with the driver. He took me to the CM's PA and left me with him. He told me to wait in the lounge. I must have waited for five minutes, he came over and took me to meet CM. I told him sorry for what happened with Guru. He accepted my sympathies and said you are aware of how Loveleen is affected by all this. She wanted to return to Bombay. I am putting someone to look after the affairs of Guru. Now I am leaving her in your hands. Now Dhruv will be without a father also. It will be up to you to look after them from now onwards. Now I have got the other side house purchased. You get her office shifted there so it will be easier for her to look after the business. I said what is the need for her, business is looked after by my wife and another girl. I am sure there is no need

for her to attend the office for the time being. He said I have got the house, it is up to you two to decide how you want to use the house. I heard you got dogs now, will they look after the premises? I said they are now six months, I will be sending them for training then they can look after all these houses. I have got gates between the houses for easy movement. If we keep the gates open they make rounds of the houses. If we don't want them to move we keep them locked. I have got barbed wire put on all the house walls. I am also thinking of putting some cameras around the property to check if anyone is moving suspiciously. I have strictly told neighbors not to entertain any newcomers for renting houses. If you want to have more security I will have the house opposite rented and used for surveillance. He said I don't think that much security is necessary, just look after her and Dhruv. I said Dhruv is already playing with my kids I will raise him as one of my kids. He said I am sure you will look after him. Go and see Loveleen and plan for returning to Bombay with her. I said thanks and came out of the room. The PA took me to a servant and handed me over told him to take me to Loveleen's room. He took me to her room knocked on the door and let me into the room and closed the door behind. I stood inside the door. She must be expecting me to come, she came over hugged me, and started crying. I caught her close and thought she must have been pushing her feelings inside for all these days. We stood like that for some time. She removed her hands from behind, I removed my hands. She caught my hand took me to the crib where Dhruv is sleeping. I looked at him, he is sleeping facing down. I touched him on his back and backed out and sat on the bed. She said I think father spoke to you regarding our going back to Bombay. I said yes. I will get them to book tickets for us. He was worried about me staying there alone. I have allayed his fears by saying you are always present there. I said he has given the fourth building beside your house. He wants us to have your office there. I said it is not necessary as Sahithi and Nishitha are looking at the office and they are doing a good job. He said to use the house as you seem fit. I gave her the house papers to her. She said you keep the papers. We will decide what to do when we go to Bombay. I don't know what would I have done without you. At least one nightmare is behind me. I asked do you mean Guru. She said yes. Father says he will get his affairs looked after by someone. I should not get into his business. I said that is correct, let them look into his businesses. You have yours at Bombay. It will be enough for you to look after. Until Dhruv gets a little older, you keep to the works you can manage. She said I will get us tickets for tomorrow to go back. I said it is ok by me. I heard you have used your free time touring Delhi and surrounding places. I said I don't want to bore Nandini so I took her to show all around Delhi. There is a knock on the door and a servant

opened the door and said Vishal had come to pick up Mr. Kumar. I got up and said I will take your leave, will meet you tomorrow at Airport. Came out of the house and got in the car went back to the flat. Nandini asked what is this time? I said our work here is complete, we will return tomorrow back to Bombay. She asked what is in your hand. I said it is the property papers for the building next to Loveleen's. what will we do with this building?

We were back in Bombay, back at the house by 12:30 pm. I put the bags and looked at the children's room, they must have gone to school. Took a cup of tea and went over to my library and sat down. Checked the progress of the hospital application. Nandini went over to her room. I will let her check once she is back in the office. I wanted to see the new house acquired by Loveleen's father. I went over to the gate and knocked on it. He must have been informed about us, he opened the gate and said come in sir. You wanted to see the house. I said I would like to have a look at the house. I wanted to see what purpose we can use the house. It was quite different from other buildings. This would be quite good for an office. It has more room than other buildings. I thought if they shift Loveleen's firm here they can save rent. I have to do something which will save rent and tax also. I came out of the building asked the watchman who is looking after the cleaning of the premises. He said some lady comes over to clean up. I told him to tell her to come and meet me. He said ok. Then I went over to Loveleen's house. The servant told me she is sitting on the backside. I went over there. She is playing with Dhruv. I took him in my hand and make some sounds and faces with him, then I gave him back to her. I said the next building seems quite nice for an office. What I am proposing is that I will put these three buildings in a separate company with the three kids' names. We will pay the rent to them. You shift your firm here and pay them the rent for the office space. They will have something for their future and our firms can save some income tax. I will put Sneha's inheritance of 5 lakhs as the capital and you put 2.5 lakhs as Dhruv's capital and these three buildings will make up the company. We will see how we can manage the money of the company. Maybe we will purchase computers and give them for rent or some other business with the capital. She said sure, we will do that. I said the only thing I can't decide is about Leena. I have not received any information about her parents or guardians. Loveleen said instead of 2.5 lakhs I will put up 5 lakhs in the company, you add Leena's name also in the company. I said I will do that.

I went back to the office, first went and met Sunitha. She asked where you went away for so long. I said I was in Delhi, you know about Loveleen's husband. After her affairs cleared we came back. She asked where is Nandini, she was with us

in Delhi helping Loveleen. Now the things are cleared and we got another building beside Loveleen's house. I looked at it, it is good for an office space. Maybe they will shift Loveleen's office here. I am planning something for the children with these buildings. I got up kissed her on the cheek and came out and went to Mahira's cabin. I told her what I have done from the time I have gone to Hyderabad. Then my idea of starting a firm in the name of children adding the three building and some capital to run the firm. I asked her if she would like to look after the new firm as an MD. She said she is happy to look after that.

Next, I went over to the developers cabin. I checked with them the progress of the work and I told them to keep the completed work ready for Nandini who would be coming after sometime. I went out of the office lit a fag and sat on a bench. Sonu, Monu came running. I rubbed them and they ran away.

I went to the house. I remembered I had to send them for training, I rang up the person who has sold me the dogs. He said there is dog training institute in Juhu. I took the address and phone no. I asked Chitti to server me lunch. Finishing lunch, I called up the dog trainers and took them to their institute for training.

I finished the procedures with them and they said come to pick up the dogs at 6 pm. I went over to the factory. We had a chat about the Hyderabad and Delhi tour details. Then I told him about starting a firm in the kids name. where we will be putting the building in their firm's name and we are also putting up some cash as capital, which we would like to use for some businesses we want to do in the firms name. I also informed him that I am putting Mahira for the MD's post for the firm. I said I want to see how she will develop the firm with the cash in her hand we are providing.

I asked him where is Krishna? He said he is on the shop floor. I said you are making him work on the shop floor. He said he likes to supervise the work there. So, I let him work there. We were different, we like to work in the office, he is a little different that way. It is okay with me, I can work in the office and he looks after the shop floor. I said let us go for a fag. We got up and went down, Krishna seeing me came over, I told him to come with us and we went by car to the paan shop. Where we got the fags and stood smoking. I asked Krishna how the work is going on? He said nice going on. I think you have improved processes and I am trying to improve the manufacturing. I said good you are taking initiative. He said if Kirit is happy I am happy. I asked Kirit are you using Sunitha's flat. He said no, I have not used it after you gave me the keys. My family is looking for matches with our relatives. There was a match came from Mira Road. My father and mother went over there to have a look. If they are satisfied

I will go and have a look. I said good if you don't have the use for the flat I will return them. I think the renewal is coming up this month's end. He said I will give you the keys when we return to the factory. I collected the keys while returning back I visited the flat and asked the watchman to separate our household items. Then I will come and check what to do with those items. I gave him the keys as the renewal is coming up I will not renew the house for rent. On the way, I stopped at the Shakha Pramukh's office and enquired about Leena's parents. He said they have done all they could do to find her parents. Nothing can be found about them. I said I will keep her with me. She has mixed with our kids even though they are a year older than her.

I returned home.

The children returned from their school. I went and enquired how they are studying and things like that. They asked where are the dogs, I said I took them to give training, I will go and get them back. If they want they can come with me to look at their training. They said they wanted to come.

I asked Chitti to bring them to go to Dogs training center. First Get me a cup of tea. After having tea, we went over to the dog center. The kids looked at dogs getting trained. We collected Sonu, Monu returned home.

I went over to the library and sat there looking at the documents updated in the server. Sunitha came over and sat on the opposite chair. I looked up and asked her how the work is going on. Did she have any new orders? She said she is following up on some clients. How the salesmen are working I asked? She said they are in a better position with interior designing than software. I said I know software is new to the country. We have to make them understand the advantages of using the software. Maybe a shortage of hardware might be one of the reasons. So, I am offering hardware renting with the software. We will see how this will pick up. Watchman informed that Sahithi and Nishitha have returned from their office. I have told him to inform me when they returned. I said let us go to Sunitha and I went with them to the new house. I showed them the house and asked them how would it be used for their office space. Sahithi said it is good for office space, but what Loveleen says about that. I said go and speak with her about that. Then we will discuss how to go about it. We went over to Loveleen's house. I let them discuss shifting their offices and went over to our house.

I went and sat in the library. After few moments Sunitha also came over. I asked her will it be advisable to shift offices here? Sunitha said the offices they have probably better offices than here. Here they have to remodel everything again.

We should use the house for some other purposes. We sat discussing pros and cons of the shifting.

Sahithi and Nishitha came over. I asked them what have they decided about the shifting of the office. She said we don't have any time for preparing this house for office purposes now as we have much work pressure. What Loveleen said I asked? She accepted our argument and said we will wait and see if we can get any free time to process the house. I said at present we don't have any other usage for the house, at least make the house ready for occupation. We will see what we should do about the house. The three of them got up and went away. I started preparing documentation for starting a new company in the name of kids. I called up the CA about filing for the new company and I said I will come over and hand the documents for submitting. With the four kids' first names I decided to name the company LARDs Associates. I printed the documents and took them to Loveleen's for signatures. I explained to her how I named the company's name and took the signatures, went back to the library put them in a folder, and put them in a cupboard.

Chitti came and called for dinner, I told her I coming over and she went away.

Having finished dinner, I went out to the outside wandered around with the Sonu, Monu. Finishing my fag, I came back to the house.

I went and sat in the library picked a book and started reading it. I must have dozed off when Sahithi came and told me to come to bed, I got up put down the book went to bedroom. I asked Sahithi did she take the medicines, she said yes. I fell on the bed and went to sleep.

When I got up it is around 6:30. I went to the bathroom, brushed, and went to the kitchen. No one seemed to have got up. I prepared myself a cup of coffee went to the library and sat down. What are my today's works? I have to go to meet CA. check the hospital software progress. Take Sonu, Monu to training. I need an office boy for the outside work. I called Kirit and asked for Krishna. He said Krishna had not come as there is a film shooting going on in Vakola. I said where is the place for shootings in Vakola. He said his friend's house compound they are using for shooting. Ok, I said. Cut the call and called Shakha Pramukh. I asked him I heard there is a movie shooting going on in Vakola? He said in the next society there is a movie shooting is going on. Sanjay Dutt is the hero in the movie. So, did you call for this? I said no, I wanted an office boy for us, I called Krishna they said he had not come because of the shooting. He said yeh, he must have gone to watch the shooting, I will check if anyone is available to work. I cut the call. If they are having movie shooting in the nearby society

means where Sahithi used to go for typewriting. It has four buildings on all sides and open space in the middle. If they can use that area for movie shootings why can't we use our buildings for movie shootings? Will the new house be suitable for movie shooting? I think we should shift to that building then we can use our building for shootings. First, I have to find out if they are willing to use the bungalows for film shootings. I have to give this work to Mahira.

I got up went to the bathroom for a bath dressed and came to the dining hall. Completing breakfast collected the papers for CA and took Sonu, Monu and dropped them at the training center, and went over to CA's office. Submitted the papers and asked them to prepare the firm to offer a wide range of businesses. Because we have not decided what kind of business we are going to run under this firm. At present we want to rent our buildings under this firm. Completing formalities came back to the office.

I went over to Mahira's cabin informed her about the registering company and my thought about renting the bungalows for the purpose of movie shooting. She said she will enquire about that with some known people. I called Kirit and enquired about Krishna, he said he had come to the factory. I told him to enquire about an office boy for us, and also to enquire about renting our bungalows for renting for movie shootings. He said when he comes up he will get him to give me a call. I cut the call went over to Sunitha's cabin.

I told her about registering for a new firm in the name of children. As we did not have any news about Leena's parents I decided to include her in the firm's beneficiaries. I want her to have equal rights as other children and Loveleen also accepted my outlook on this and she is ready to put capital in her name also.

Sunitha asked why did you not come last night? I said I dozed off to sleep and did not wake up until the morning. She said it's ok you must have been tired. I got up from there went over to the developer's cabin. They were almost at the completing stage of the project. I asked about Nandini, they said they have not seen her, she must be at the hospital. I said after completing the project, I want to check the application and came over to my cabin. Prepared myself a cup of tea sat down on the chair.

PART 5

Kumar runs businesses

Chapter 1

The year 1994 January.

Kumar

We completed the Hospital project and implemented in the hospital. Nandini is looking at the implementation of the project in the hospital. She is in touch with the developers for making changes in the software, I have lost touch with her.

The children's firm had taken a computer hardware dealership and are supplying systems to our clients. Mahira is in talks about giving the bungalows for rent. They were interested in our two bungalows where we are staying. After consultation with Loveleen, we decided to shift to the fourth house. Loveleen also expressed interest to come live with us in the house. As it has more rooms, I asked Sahithi to prepare the house into two parts for us to stay together.

Sahithi's flat I gave to my brother to store his things there. He has closed his business and wants to shift his materials.

Kirit's marriage is fixed for this summer.

Now the children's birthday is coming up. This is the first birthday after we shifted here. I planned to have the party in the name of LARDs Associates. As we don't know when Leena's birthday is, we decided to celebrate her birthday also with them. I don't want her to feel neglected.

We arranged the party in our backyard and the birthday party in Loveleen's backyard, afterward the dinner arrangements will be made. In the fourth bungalow, works are still going on. In our office backyard, I had special party for VIPs.

I had put up a screen with our hospital management software running on the screen. Mahira had invited some people from the movie industry to have a look at the bungalows. Kid's firm's management is left to Mahira. We only asked to be informed about what decisions she is taking.

Nandini came around 7:30 and I must have seen her after 2 months. I asked her are you angry with me? She said why I would be angry with you. I said I have not seen you for the last two months. She said you know I have been back with the hospital managing the hospital work and software is a little tiring. I did not get time to ring you up. I said it's ok. At least you have come to this party. How is the hospital building going on at Hyderabad? She said in another two months

building works would be complete. They have ordered equipments to be delivered after three months. I asked why after three months? It would take at least that much time for the deliveries. If we order them later they may ask for premium prices for them. So, we have ordered in advance. I asked how the finances are managed. She said at the present time they don't have much problem. We have to see when the hospital actually starts running. I said remember you can always approach me for any kind of help. She said my father is confident you will come in an emergency to help out, so, he is not worried about the finances. I said that's all I want. Come I will introduce you to the other hospital's management. I took her to the office backyard where the party is arranged for the clients. I introduced her as the architect of our hospital management software. She had done her hospital management in the USA. After hearing the words, the USA they all started showing interest in her and started asking her a variety of questions about hospital management and software. I let her deal with them and went over to Mahira's guests. One of them asked you seems to still live here, how can you give for rent. I said we have already making arrangements in the fourth house for living and then these two houses are available for rent. Our offices are also available for renting office setup. We are only using part of the bungalow for our offices. The fourth building is closed now because works are going on. You can come after a week to have a look at these houses. We also have two dogs to look after the buildings. They have just completed training. We have to restrain them for the party. I asked Mahira where is Sunitha, I have not seen her? She said I also have not seen her. I went inside the house and went to her room. She sat on her bed ready. I asked her why did you not come to the party? She said I am feeling ashamed to meet your family. I said why you should be ashamed? You did not want to marry that's all. Come and meet them, they don't have anything against you. Come and took her hand took her to the backyard of Loveleen's house where all the family members were sitting. I took her to my father and said you remember Sunitha. He said where have you disappeared, we heard what happened to you. You are very lucky. What are you doing now? She said I am looking after the firm as Operations Director. He said oh, impressive designation. I said she has impressive work also. She is looking after the sales for the two firms. Our software and Loveleen's interior designing firm also. I called Mahira and introduced her and she is working as MD for the kid's firm. What is this kid's firm? I said I transferred these bungalows to Kid's firm and we are paying them rent for using them. Also, we have taken computer dealership and we are selling them through this firm. Mahira is looking after that firm. So, in a way the kid's future is in her hand. Father asked how many firms you are

running now. I said only two one is software development and the other is this kids firm. He said four bungalows in this area are a great achievement. How much time did it take for all these, two years? I said something like that. Sahithi's father came over and said I never thought you could achieve all this in such a little time. I said your daughter is doing what she likes, I am happy for her. He said she did not seem like her former self. I said she is mentally disturbed in her previous company and she is getting treatment for that. She is better now.

Sahithi's sister and brother in law just walked in. I said you are late. He said some problem at the work got me delayed. I said to him come and took him to the other building left with Krishna who is looking after the guests.

Kirit came with his fiancé. He said she has to come from Mira Road, that is why delayed. I said you had come that is enough. Take her to the other building where my family are there. He took her to Loveleen's backyard.

I checked over guests once more returned to Loveleen's backyard. Checked there and returned to the office backyard. Kirit left his fiancé with our family and came looking for me. I gave him a glass of whiskey and we sat down at a table. We chatted for some time.

Nandini brought a client for hospital software. He was asking how we will go about implementing the software. I told him about how we will study the hospital working environment and make customizations accordingly. He asked some more questions to satisfy himself. I said if you want to see how they are working on the software, you can check with Nandini she will arrange a tour of the hospital. He said he would like a tour of the hospital, I told Nandini to see how he would like to go about it. They both went away. Kirit said it seems Hospital software would bring some good returns. I said it would certainly do that. We need more products like that. I gave him a fag and lit one and his. We silently smoked. Completing fag, we went to Loveleen's backyard. I told him if he wants his wedding he can have it here, we got a good place.

We put some items on the plate and sat at a table. Sunitha came with her plate and joined us. I recollected when she first came to the kid's birthday. How my brother was with her the whole time. Then how we sat and discussed Sneha's death and how it leads to her coming close to us. Kirit asked in a whisper are you two still together. I said yes. He asked how are you managing? I said we are just managing. He and Mahira are the only people who know about me and Sunitha.

Completing dinner Kirit got up saying he had to drop her at Mira Road. I asked him how are you going? He said by Train. I said I will drop them off at Station. He said he had his bike, he will put the bike at the station then they will proceed on the train. I said good luck to him and left him at the gate.

At last, the party finished and the guests left one by one. I think we got one hospital software order.

I went and checked that the children are already asleep. Caterers are clearing up the tables and dishes. I looked out for Krishna, he is busy giving instructions to the waiters. I called him and said to meet me before going away. He came over and asked what is it? I said I need a driver and office assistant. He said he will look and tell me. I went and sat in the library.

I sat there for some time got up went to the bathroom had a bath changed into nightwear and lay on the bed. Kids' birthday always brings Sneha's memories upfront. I could not get sleep with all the memories flooding my mind. I looked beside me, Sahithi is in sound sleep. I got up and tiptoed to Sunitha's room. I knocked lightly on the door. Sunitha opened the door let me in and closed the door. She said I thought you would not come tonight. I said I am not getting sleep, so I came over. She took a bottle from the cupboard poured me a drink and gave it to me. I sipped the drink. It is four years since I first saw her on kids birthday. I said you are not taking care of yourself. She asked why do you say that? I said you have become dull. You were not like this when you were working on Airlines. She said yes, for the last year I have been ignoring to look after myself. There was a knock on the door. Sunitha went and opened the door. It is Sahithi, Sunitha asked what happened? Sahithi said I am looking for Kumar, she said to me what are doing here? I showed my glass and said having a peg. She said come and sleep. I said let me finish this I am coming. She went away. Sunitha asked why did she come here looking for you? I said I don't know, I will come later and went to the bedroom.

Sahithi asked why did you go there? I said I had remembered I had to discuss something with Sunitha, so I went over there. She asked why are you disturbing her at this hour? I said I wanted a peg so I went over to her, if she did not have some, I would have gone to Loveleen's. Sometimes I get ideas in the middle of the night, I go there to discuss the ideas with her. She keeps a bottle for me there. She pours me one and we discuss the matters. Sahithi asked what is so urgent you want to discuss in the middle of the night. I said it has something to do with you. As your medicines are not having any effect, I want her to go to Godrej and offer to develop software for them. She asked how getting a

software project will help me. I want to fix your manager if we get a chance. I will send both Sunitha and Mahira for that. I have to discuss this in the morning, please remind me and turned aside and closed my eyes.

I got up in the morning made two cups of coffee and took it to Sunitha's room. I explained her what I had spoken with Sahithi about coming to her room. Completing our coffee, I took the cups into the kitchen placed them on the sink.

I went to my library and sat down on the chair.

The watchman called from the gate and said there is a boy here who came for the driver's job. I told him to send him to the library. He came over and told me his name is Ramu and he is Krishna's cousin brother. He came for the job of the driver. I enquired about his experience. He said he had worked as a driver for more than a year. I said it is not just driving the car, there could be work running errands. Take kids to school. He said he is ready for all the works. I told him to go and get me a tea from the kitchen. Chitti came with a cup of tea, Ramu came with her. I introduced him as Ramu, a new driver and he will help in taking the kids to school. She said ok and went away. I told him next week we might be shifting to another building. I asked him where are you staying. He said he is staying with some people. I said if you want to stay here I will make arrangements. He said ok, I don't have any problem staying here. I said for the time being you be with the watchman until we shift to the new house.

I got up went to the bathroom for bath and came out dressed. Sahithi has not yet woken up. I shook her catching shoulders, she said sleepily what? I said it's eight o'clock get up. She said ok, I will get up.

I went over to the dining hall. Chitti came over shall I serve breakfast. I said yes.

Completing breakfast, I went over to my room in the office.

I put a note for the developers to make the hospital software for product launch.

The phone rang and it is CA asking to come for some signatures. I said I will be there in one hour. I wanted to check Ramu's driving, so I asked him to be ready with the car. I told him to take to CA's office and I finished the signatures and came out. I thought I should make a visit to the second-hand book shops near the fountain. I said driver to wait and went over by walk to the shops. I looked at the books. I wanted any books that would explain the mystery of Leena's appearance. I selected some books and paid for them and came back to the car.

We rode back to the home. I put the books in the library and went over to Loveleen to explain the visit to CA's office.

I said I am planning to have the kid's room separately for the time being as Reena and Leena will stay in one room and Atul and Dhruv will stay in one room. Is it ok for you? She said an excellent idea for them to stay together. I asked how do you want your room next to the children's room or a little farther away. She said a little farther away would be ok. I said I think the painting is finished I will check how to allot rooms. I went to the office and asked Sunitha what her room should look like. Noted her requirements. Went back to the new house. Sahithi is supervising works. I said I want two rooms in the middle for children. One room for Atul and Dhruv and one room for Reena and Leena. Show me which room you are allotting for Loveleen. She took me to the room allotted for Loveleen. It is big enough for her needs. Satisfied I said this room seems ok, I will let her check it out once. Where would be our room? She took me to a room on the first floor and it is also big enough for us. And where is Sunitha's room? She showed me another room on the first floor. I said take these recommendations for this room and handed over the Sunitha requirements. Where will be my library? She showed me a room on the first floor farthest from Sunitha's room. I said ok for my requirements. I said I think Chitti will have a room adjacent to kid's rooms. She said yes. I asked where you are planning for Servants rooms? She showed rooms, I asked her to provide a room for the driver also. After all this how many rooms will be available. She said she has to check again if any other requirements to be met. How many guest rooms are you providing I asked? She said I will plan it and tell you. While coming back I went over to Loveleen and asked her check her room. She said she will have a look.

I went over to Sunitha's room and told her to come with me to Mahira's room. I explained them what is required of them as I told Sahithi. I told them to take driver with the car. They went away.

Mahira

This is the first time me and Sunitha were attending a client. Let me see how she handles the client. I told Sunitha you speak with the client and I will support you. She said ok. She must be gaining confidence in working in the firm. We went over to the company and asked for a meeting with the Purchase Manager. He seemed to be free at the time and he asked us to be sent. We went over to his cabin and sat down. He asked what can I do for you ladies. I looked at Sunitha, she opened her bag and took a visiting card from it, and gave it to him.

He looked at the card and said Software Development Company. Sunitha said we are offering our services to your company. We develop customized software. We have recently completed a Hospital software for this hospital. She took a broacher and handed it to him. He asked what kind of software you are going to prepare? Sunitha replied we got some reports that the central excise system would be changed in the next financial year. Which will necessitate doing major changes in the way you prepare accounts and invoices, etc. if you have a software system in place by that time it would be easier for you to change over to any system. He asked how do you know the systems will be changed in the next financial year. I wanted to ask the same question, but I did not want to ask in front of the client. Sunitha replied we have political connections in Delhi, we just received this news. She turned to me and said morning Kumar got the information from Delhi. She turned to Purchase Manager. He asked who is Kumar? She said he is our MD. He looked at the card and said I heard the name before and thought for a minute and said is he Sahithi's husband? Sahithi used to work with us as steno. I said yes, do you know him? I think he took her to some other firm and made her manager there. I said yes, it is an interior designing firm. Sunitha is handling that firm's marketing also. He said we recently purchased a house and I am thinking of getting decorating done, can you handle it. Sunitha said yes, we handle the interior decorating also. I take the orders and send them to visit the place and they offer suggestions based on that the pricing is fixed. Give me your house address, I will send someone there. He took a paper and noted down the address and his phone number and said before anyone visited, give a ring at this number. Someone will be present at the address. Now coming to the software, how can we be sure that the excise system will be changed? Sunitha said let us assume the system has not been changed what will you lose, you will have a software system in place to run the things of the company. The efficiency of the company would increase by at least fifty percent. If we assume if the system is changed and you will have an updated system in no time and you will be able to put your products to the market before your competitors. He asked what if you offer this new system to our competitors? Sunitha replied when the time comes we will offer this software for general consumption but you will be the first to receive the updates. You will be the first to the market. We are offering means we will deliver the software to you first then we will offer in the market. It is for you to decide you want the latest software or you want to get it from the free market, by that time possibly your competitor has the software and will release the products into the market before you. We will give you a day to decide if we don't receive any update from you we will go to your competitors with the same offer. He asked

how can we be sure you can deliver the software? If you want to check the software we made for a production factory, we have our software installed at Bhandup you can visit the factory and see for yourself how much efficiency they have achieved. Sunitha noted down the factory address and telephone no and contact person and gave him the paper. I said if you want to visit the factory we can take you with us, we have a car waiting outside. He said then I would like to visit before taking any decision. I said can I make a call? He said go ahead and pushed the phone towards me. I called Kirit's number and asked him are you there for some time? He said he will be there until evening. I said I am coming with a client, he wants to see our software. He said you can come anytime. I cut the call by cradling the receiver and said come on then we can visit the factory. I got up and he informed his assistant he will return in an hour and came with us. We sat in the car and I gave instructions to the driver on how to go to the factory. I turned to the Manager and said he is new to us. We stopped outside the factory and instructed the driver to park the car. Seeing the car Krishna came out and spoke to his brother. Mahira asked is Kirit in his cabin. Krishna replied yes. Mahira lead the way to the cabin. Kirit showed the software workings and said previously two of us used to run the factory. Now with the help of the software, I alone run it and have a lot of free time also. He asked who developed this software. Mahira said our MD has done this personally when he decided to change from factory manager to software development. He asked did he worked here? Kirit replied yes, he was working as a manager then one day he decided he want to develop software and he built this system and went and started his software firm. We are all shareholders in this firm.

He got up and said ok, let us go. Mahira led him to the outside. After coming out he said I think we get our tins manufactured by them. At first, they were taking a lot of time delivering the tins after we ordered them. Nowadays they deliver them when we asked them for. Mahira said that is because of the software. It manages the schedules according to the clients. It seems it has its own mind.

We dropped him at his offices. He said he will have a word with his MD and let us know. We said thanks and drove off.

I turned to Sunitha how does Kumar know about the change in the excise rules? He had a call in the morning from Delhi, they had discussed the same in Budget meetings yesterday. If the new system is put in place the excise duty paid on the input materials will be deducted from the manufactured goods excise duty to be paid. That means take the example of this car if the excise duty to be paid on this car is 50 thousand and we purchased many parts and we paid 25thousand as excise duty then we need to pay the government 25thousand as excise duty.

For this purpose, they need software to track all the input items and calculate the duty.

I said if this system is brought up it will revolutionize the way businesses run. Sunitha said it will also create headaches to calculate the duties to be paid. That is why we need software.

Kumar

Pauleen rang me up and said there is a call for Sunitha from Godrej. I said they have not come back from the company yet, give me the call I will speak. She gave me the call and I said hello, what can I do for you, sir? He said Sunitha and Mahira have just visited us about software development. I said they must be on the way, they have not yet reached our offices. He said are you Kumar speaking? I said yes. He said I wanted to speak to you only, I had spoken with our MD and he wants to meet you immediately, can you come over. I said as soon as Sunitha and Mahira reach the office I will leave from here. He said ok and cut the call.

I rang up the watchman and told him to send Sunitha and Mahira when they return. When the watchman called they have arrived, I told him to send them to my house, I am coming. I went and took them to dining room and asked Chitti to serve lunch. While having lunch, we have discussed what has transcribed in the visit. I told them about the call from the Manager. I said he has called me to come there. After completing lunch, I asked Sunitha to accompany me to the company. We both went over to Godrej. Purchase Manager took us to their MD.

We all sat down and the MD asked what have you told our manager. I looked at Sunitha. She said we offered to develop software for you. MD asked what is this talk about having a new central excise policy. She said I have given him a hint of new central excise rules coming up in the next financial year. MD looked at me. I said it is true there is a talk of changing the central excise rules. He asked what is going to be changed? I looked at Sunitha to give a reply. She said let me tell you what I have understood. You will get input credit for the central excise duty paid on the inputs. He asked how will it work? She said to say you are selling 100 packs of toothpaste on which you have to pay 500 rupees as central excise. You had paid central excise of 200 on the inputs. So, you need to pay only 300 rupees as central excise. He looked at me as if this was true? I said it would work something like that. He asked how did you know about this? I said yesterday they had a budget meeting, on which they discussed this possibility. It has been approved for inclusion in this year's budget proposals. He asked who has

informed you about this? I said we have sources in the ministry, we are always informed about the changes in this kind of thing. But how would they would inform you? I said this should not go out of this room, Haryana CM's daughter is one of the partners in the firm. He said I read somewhere her husband was murdered outside his house. I said yes, it was her husband. He asked what is her name? I said her name is Loveleen. He asked where is she now. I said in Mumbai only. We have houses side by side. Our office is also there. Next week we are having a housewarming ceremony, you should come. He said I will certainly come. He said about this change of the rules, how certain are you? I said 95 percent chance of they are going ahead with this. I heard they have finalized going ahead with this. He looked at the purchase manager. He said we should go ahead with the software. Even if the changes are not done we need the software to improve our efficiency. I checked their software, everything is automated if we can make it a success we might reduce staff in the future. They also supply the computers, they have a sister concern for that. I said we have a dealership for computers. We are supplying the computers with our software compatible with the software. MD said you prepare a proposal and submit we will look into that. I said when the time comes, we will sell the software in the market but we will remove items specific to your company. He said ok. We shook hands and we returned to our office. I said you have done a good job with them. I think it is the first time you meeting the clients. She said I have been meeting the clients for Interior decoration, but this is the first time I met a client for software development. Mahira let me handle the client. I said good, come we will have tea and sit down to prepare an offer letter.

I prepared two cups of tea and placed them on the table. I told Sunitha to prepare an offer letter. I turned the monitor and gave her the keyboard. I opened a format for an offer letter and let her prepare. I sat there looking at her working. I got up said I will be back and went to Mahira's room. She got up and came out and we went down to the backyard where we normally smoke. I gave her one and took one fag and lit both. I said Sunitha is preparing offer letter please check it once.

Sunitha

In the meeting with the client, both Mahira and Kumar let me handle the client. In the meeting with the MD, Kumar let me explain the details to him. He only interjected with their MD asked him direct questions. Now he has left me to do the offer letter. He seems to have confidence in my work. Now he must have gone out for a fag. I think he is smoking too much. But who am I to tell him that.

Sahithi seems disinterested in him nowadays. Then why did she come to my room in the night looking for Kumar? Will she prevent him from coming to my room? He was away for 15 days. Will he come tonight? If he comes, will she follow him? Then how can we get away from her? Can we meet here, this room has all the facilities. Will she come over here? What will she do if she finds us in a compromising position? Kumar has taken her to the doctor and he gave her medicines, still, there is no change in her. How long will this go on? I heard a sound and turned my head, Mahira and Kumar were back from their smoking. Mahira sat beside me and Kumar went and sat on his chair. I looked at Mahira, she nodded her head and said carry on. Both of them were discussing some business matters. I know Kumar removed the marketing division from her and gave it to me with her salesman. Now he has given her the new firm selling computers and renting the bungalows. It seems she found some movie people who are interested in renting these bungalows. These are in a very good location. Besides the beach and beautiful buildings. Now they are preparing the fourth building for residence and he told me we will shift there to reside there. He said they have allotted a room on the first floor. He said she is preparing another room on the first floor for his library. I can spend some time in the library. He also spends a lot of time there. I have to see who else gets room on the first floor. Completing the document, I said to Kumar can you look at this. Mahira said I will have a look first. I gave the keyboard to her to check the document. She made small corrections and passed on the keyboard to Kumar. Kumar turned the monitor to his side started going through the document. Finally, he said it is ok and closed the document. He said to print it send it to the purchase manager.

I looked at the time, it is four pm. I said we still have time for sending the documents. I printed it and signed and called the driver to take the envelope to the purchase manager. He went away. I said you have done a good thing by appointing a driver. We can save a lot of time going and coming.

Mahira said if they accept the offer letter then we have to prepare cost estimates for the software. Then we have to check their computer requirements. I think it would be substantial. If we had the dealership then, we could have got good sales to the Courier company. Kumar said we got a good commission on the sale of the computers to them. From that only I got the idea to take dealership of the computers. Mahira said if we get this order we might have to appoint hardware guys to install the systems.

Kumar got up to prepare tea. He brought three cups of tea and placed them on the table. We each took a cup started to sip. He took some biscuits and placed

them on the table. After shifting over here, I don't have to worry about food. Everything is readily available. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served on time. Tea and coffee are available when ever required. Only thing is that we could not meet as expected. I thought Kumar would come to my room regularly. It is not happening. Last night he had come, but Sahithi came looking for him, luckily, he was having a drink, otherwise I had to hide him and tell her he is not here. Next time she would come directly to my room looking for him. Can we look for another room? still she would come looking for me. It is not advisable. He said she is taking sleeping pills, then why did she not go to sleep. Did she stopped taking them when he had gone on tour? I can't understand her.

Now he has arranged for a driver, now I can go and visit clients like today. I think he would like me to handle clients. Did he have a fear of meeting clients? I don't think so, he speaks with so much confidence, I have to learn to be that confident with the clients. I have to speak as if we are not going to lose anything if at all losers will be the client. This kind of attitude I have to maintain. I have seen the results today. Before we could reach the office, the purchase manager has met his boss and called us back. I thought I could do nothing else except being an air hostess. Kumar has shown me a way, if I put my mind to it I could do anything. He has given me this opportunity over Mahira, who is an experienced marketing professional. He has given her a totally different post of looking after the kid's firm. Maybe he did find her not working to her capacity or not to his liking, at least I got elevation. I think our relationship has nothing to do with this. He recognizes talent. He brings out the hidden talent in people. How from a typist, Sahithi became a manager with Loveleen's firm. He knew she could do that, so he had taken her to work with Loveleen. When Loveleen went to Delhi, she became the manager. After returning back she did not take back her position, she let her work. Is it Kumar's ingenuity or Loveleen giving up her firm, I don't know. I think Loveleen doesn't want to interfere in the working of the firm, that is why she let her take Nishitha to assist Sahithi. Loveleen is happy to look after Dhruv. Maybe her husband's death has something to do with this. She doesn't want to come out in public after her husband's death. That could be the reason she did not attend the party on Kid's birthday. Maybe she is waiting for one year to complete before coming out to the public. Maybe she will let them handle the firm. Maybe she will come work with one of the firms instead of going back to interior decoration. If she asks Kumar might start a new firm for her. He is good at starting new firms. What is the need to start a firm in kid's name? He did it to move profits from one company to another. He made the three companies one and more diverse for tax purposes. Loveleen must have confidence in his abilities otherwise who would let the profits move around

companies. Loveleen's firm has more expenses and most of the transactions are in cash. Our software business has only salaries and maybe depreciation of the equipment. Now he turned over the buildings to the kid's firm so that we will be paying rent to the firm, which is in a way to transfer our profits to the kid's firm.

Mahira touched my shoulder and said hey, are you sleeping? I said no I was thinking about how to go about it on Monday. How to do costing? Mahira said the costing we can decide after checking what they want to put in software. What departments did they want to cover? After checking their requirements, we need to calculate man-hours and how much effort we need to put in, then we can calculate the cost. I said so we still have some time. I will be in my room.

Mahira

Is Kumar giving Sunitha more importance, because she is sleeping with him? Or is she really talented? The way she spoke with the purchase manager, it seems she has picked up on marketing. Kumar told her about the changes in the excise duty and not me. Did he expect her to take lead in the discussions? Did I do a mistake telling her to take the lead in the discussions? However, my firm would gain if we get this order from them. Supplying computers for the whole organization would be substantial billing. I have to start organizing the company for supplying the computers in time. I also need a hardware person to look after the installation of computers. Will the vendors offer their personnel for the installation? I have to check with Kumar what kind of software to be loaded in their systems. I said I am going home and got up and went away.

Kumar

I went with Mahira to the gate and lighted a fag and stood there and smoked. Ramu returned on the car and parked inside. He came over and said he had handed over the papers to the purchase manager and he said he will let us know about them on Monday. I said it is okay. Did you have lunch? He said no. Go home and ask Chitti she will serve you. Don't wait for this late. When you are hungry go and ask Chitti. If you want tea or coffee then our kitchen here is equipped for that. You can prepare and have it. He said ok and went to the house.

I returned back to Sunitha's cabin. I went and sat in front of her in a chair. She looked up smiled and continued with her work. I thought that smile is enough to drop anyone to her feet. Still, she is keeping with me. Is our bond so strong, she would not think about anyone else. Many times, she told me before her weekly

off she would only think about me, to come to me and be with me. But she never asked for marriage. She would say being with you is enough for me. She never asked for kids, she would say your kids are mine, why do I need other kids? It is the same with Sahithi also. Why these two are scared of childbearing? Sahithi says she is scared because she saw her friend die from childbirth. What is Sunitha's problem? What she is scared of? Did she think her beauty would be affected from childbirth? I read somewhere about these kinds of ladies. Or is it something else? We never had spoken about that. Maybe because we are not married these talks about kids have never came up. She lifted her head and asked what? I asked did you ever think about kids? She said what do I need kids for? I already had two now three. I asked what? She said I consider Atul, Reena, and Leena as my children. I never thought they are someone else's kids. I was surprised by her statement. I know in the beginning she used to visit for the kids, after getting herself a flat she stopped coming to our house. Then her statement seemed surprising. After coming to stay with us I have not seen her interact with them much. Now her words are surprising to me. Have I been missing something about her? Sunitha asked what are you thinking? I said recently I have not seen you interacting with the kids. How can you say these are your kids. She said how can you say that after coming to live here I have always been looking out for them. I daily go and play with them for some time. You may not have observed it. I thought I should check with Chitti about this, why talk about it without having full knowledge about this. I said I thought after getting the flat you were not visiting them so you were not interested in the kids. She said then I had very little time to spend with you, where would I get time to go and meet the kids? You were my number one priority and kids were second. But they were also my priority. I know you have Chitti and Sahithi lookout for them. I like Reena out of the three. Even I brought them some gifts recently. Whenever I get some time I go spend them with them. Now it has become easier for me. I asked what do you think about Leena? I could not find any information about her. It is all very confusing. I even brought some book to study how this could be possible. At least she mixed with the other kids.

She completed her work and printed it and closed the system. I asked her does her work is completed? She said yes, let us go. She took the printed papers and we came out of the office. I asked her what is this? She said leads for the interior decorations. Daily I print the leads and pass them in the evening. They take up the leads the next day. We went and sat in the hall. Sahithi and Nishitha came after some time. She handed the material to her and said send someone to the purchase manager, don't go yourself. Sahithi said I will send Nishitha. Sunitha said to send someone with her, don't send her alone. She said ok. There

is a phone number there first give him a call he will tell you when to come to the house. It is a newly constructed house and no one would be at the house. Sahithi said thanks for the information. I felt they both are keeping the professional relationship. Chitti brought tea and placed it on the table in front of us. I picked a cup started sipping it. Completing her tea Sahithi went over to her room. Nishitha and Sunitha started discussing her clients on her list. Sunitha was enquiring about the leads she had given previously. I let them work and went over to the library. I picked up the books I had brought and looked at them.

One book is Chariots of gods and the second book is Earth in Upheaval, worlds in collision both by Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky. There are many other books by him. It seems someone collected these books and sold them off to the second-hand book shop. I started reading them. They made interesting reading. I was reading the first book when Sunitha came over and she picked a book and started reading it. We were reading the books until Sahithi came over to announce dinner. I looked at the time it is 9 pm. I told Sunitha let us have dinner and come. She put a bookmark and set aside the book she is reading. I put my book aside went with her for dinner. After dinner, we started where we left off. We were reading until 12 midnight. Sahithi came over and asked aren't you coming to sleep. I said let me finish this chapter. Sunitha put aside the book and got up and went to her room. Seeing Sahithi still standing there, I said I will have a fag and come got up, and went outside. Seeing me the dogs have come moving their tails. I rubbed them and they went away. In the nighttime we are leaving them outside with the gates between buildings open, so they can move freely around. They have a room built for them in the corner of the property, where they go away after making rounds of the property. Finishing my fag, I came back to the bedroom. Sahithi sitting on the bed, I asked did she take her medicines? She asked what were you doing? I said you did see we were reading. I brought them when I went to CA's office. I was checking the books. You did not tell me about the medicines. She said I took my medicines. I said you seem to ignore taking the medicines. You were becoming your old self again. Let us go to the doctor tomorrow. She said there is nothing wrong with me. I asked then why are you behaving like this? She asked how am I behaving? You were not sleeping, getting up in the middle of the night. Becoming jealous, checking on me what I am doing. We are in a precarious position with the firm. We have to pick up business otherwise we can't sustain much longer and our capital would evaporate and we will be left with nothing in our name. That is the reason I put up these buildings in kids name. Even if we lose everything kids should not suffer due to our mismanagement. I got very important information from Delhi, I had to convey that information to Sunitha and send her to get some orders. I

think we have succeeded in presentation. We have to wait until Monday to receive any communication regarding this. If we get this order our two firms will be up and running. She said but we have bank balance in the firms name, why are you worried. I said that balance is because of our political affiliation. I don't know how long we can maintain that. If they gain power we will be in green and if they lose the power, we will be in red. So, we can't always depend on them for our firm. We had to get orders, who have to up our ante to get orders. Nandini's hospital will start working in six months, I am sure we will get their order. But in the mean time we have to get other orders to keep up. We have such a big office space. We are hardly using 25 percent space for our offices. I want that to raise to at least 90 percent. Then we are working at optimal conditions. Until then I could not sleep. I get ideas in the middle of the night, I had to convey them immediately or I will forget them. If I forget the ideas it will be loss for the firm. You have to understand and be a good girl and take medicines and sleep peacefully. I will come back and went to the library to note down some points that have come into my mind She came behind me to see what I am doing. I looked up and said see what I am writing gave her the writing pad. I don't like constant supervision of my work. I want to be the boss. I give my employees some leeway to work without supervision. If they can perform without supervision, I let them work in their way. If they can't work without supervision then I do supervise their work. See what happened with Rajesh, I let him start off the hospital project. He could not get ahead with himself, so I put him on other work and started working on that myself. Then when he finished the other work I let him take over the project, I let Nandini supervise their work. I was only checking their progress meanwhile and if they are going in the right direction or not. You may ask why I let Nandini supervise their work. Because she is invested in the project. She wants the project to be completed earliest, then she can go back to Hyderabad to look after her hospital. She has done a hospital management course, so she should be aware of supervisory tactics. See you have to learn to delegate not to take up all the work on yourself. You see what happened with Mahira, she was working as a Marketing executive in the field. When I gave her the position of director, she could not cope with that. Because she is accustomed to working in the field. So, I let Sunitha take over her work in the guise of helping your firm. I am sure she got you some good leads. Now I gave Mahira the kids firm to look after. I thinks she will do good work there. She got some people to use our bungalows for movie making. You have to find their strong points and give them work. How being from a typist you have risen to the manager with Loveleen's firm. You were given the opportunity to show your talent. You should have got out their earlier, but I did not

understand your problem then. By the time I realized your problem it has become late, at least you could get out of that. But still you were not your old self. Where is that Sahithi, who made me the man I am today? If you had not done what you have done for me where I would be? I will give you total credit for the position we are in to you only. Tell me if you have problem with this work, I will look something else for you. She said I am comfortable with this work. I asked tell me what you want me to do for you. She said nothing. I said then go and sleep peacefully, I will complete this and come. She went away. I put the notes in a file and saved them. If the matter is for everyone I would put the note in the server.

I went back to the bedroom and Sahithi is waiting for me to get back. I sat on the bed and looked at her. I adjusted myself and sat with my back to the head of the bed and adjusted pillows behind my back. She asked what am I doing wrong? I said you think about what you are doing right, automatically you will understand what you are doing wrong. She seemed to be thinking hard. I sat there and closed my eyes. She said I am keeping you away. I opened my eyes and looked at her and asked why? She said I don't understand myself. I waited for her to continue. But she did not say anything else. She seemed to be in two minds to tell or not. I called her to come near. She moved near me. I put my hand around her shoulder pulled her to me. I caught her close to me. I woke up in a shudder. Sahithi is sleeping putting her head on my chest. I moved her head and put it on a pillow. I got up and went to library lit a fag and sat on the chair.

I got up from the chair after finishing my fag walked to Sunitha's room. On the way looked at our bedroom. Sahithi is sleeping, I went to Sunitha's room and knocked lightly. She opened the door after a minute. I went in and she closed the door and locked it. She asked do you want a peg. I said no. I went and sat on the bed. Sunitha came and stood near me. I pulled her to me and kissed her.

I went back to the bedroom and laid on the bed. Sahithi asked sleepily where did you go? I said for a fag and went back to sleep.

I got up in the morning went to the bathroom brushed and went to the kitchen prepared a cup of coffee and sat down in the hall. After finishing the coffee, I went out to have a fag. I lit a fag and the watchman seeing me came over and said Loveleen madam told me to tell you to come and meet her as soon as you get up. I said what could be such an emergency, went through the gate between the properties. Sonu, Monu came behind me. When I approached the door, I told them to sit down. They sat down calmly looking at me. I patted them and rang the bell. A servant opened the door. I asked why did madam called me to

come? He said I will call madam, she is waiting for you. She came and sat down on the sofa. She must have sent the servant to call him, her father's PA came over and sat on the sofa opposite to me. I looked at Loveleen why he is here. She said he came late at night, so I left a message with your watchman when he sees you to give you the message. I said you could have called me, asked what can I do? The PA said we were in a problem with Guru's death. One group of the MLA's, who have not got any posts are trying to malign the name of CM with the central leadership. I asked what are they doing? He said if he can't save his own son in law what he can do with the state? This is their argument. I asked so what is the problem? He said if the central leadership comes to know about this, they will remove him from CM and appoint another CM. I said let me see, the group is alleging that he could not save the Son in law. You put out a rumour that he has not tried to save him because he is punishing him for his misdeeds. Make this a small rumour and let it spread through the rank and file and see its effect. One way we are warning we will not let anyone go scot-free if they try anything with the ministry. Another point we are making is we will not leave anyone even son in law if he does something wrong. I think it will send a strong message to the party cadres. Let us see after a week how they are doing, then we will discuss further action. He asked will it not come back to bite in the back? I said let the rumour start from a small party member, who speaks under the influence of alcohol. Let another member validate the statement. Let it go from one person to another. By the time it reaches to press the rumour would change its shape altogether. The person who started can always say he did not remember what he said under influence of alcohol. You need a trustworthy person for this. He said we have someone like that. I think Vishal would fit the bill to start this. He sits with the other drivers for drinking. He is trustworthy to start this. I said a good idea. He said I don't want to discuss this matter on phone so, I flew here in the evening. I will return to Delhi on the first flight. I said good luck and got up went back to the house.

When I entered the house, Sahithi asked me where did you go? I said someone came from Delhi on an urgent matter, I was discussing with him what to do. She asked did you complete the discussions? I said yes, I am going for a bath.

I came and sat at the dining table for breakfast. Sahithi brought breakfast and put it in front of me. I said today is Sunday, I am free, what work you have? She said I am sending Nishitha and another to purchase manager's new house. Possibly I will go and check the works going on at Dadar, Kirit's neighbours have given an order for decoration. Then I will be back at the house. And check the works going on at the new bungalow. I said you seems to have full-day work, I

will be at my library. Hasn't Sunitha got up? Sahithi replied I gave her coffee and she is reading in her room. She caught your reading bug. I smiled and said I got her reading bug not the other way. We both have reading in common.

I said I want Loveleen's room prepared first. She asked what is the urgency? I said there is a man from Delhi, he was talking about a problem in the party. He came for some advice. If what I advised them goes through there will be press looking for her comments. I want her not to be found at her house. We plan to show them she went away to Delhi. Possibly she will stay at your flat for some time. They should find the bungalow empty when they come searching for her.

I went to my library continued reading the books I brought. I was reading a book on the theory of multiple universes. It was mentioned that there are wormholes in the universe that could be millions of light-years in the distance but could be reached in a second from one side to the other. It seems fascinating theory and I started reading the book on these theories. How one could travel on these things. I did not understand much from these books one thing I understood is that using these things time travel might be possible. But I did not get how this theory might attribute to Leena's case. According to Leena, we were staying with my parents in Wadala quarters and my mother was looking after Leena. Maybe at around one year of age, she was kidnapped from the park in the colony when she was taken there by my mother. She was taken to some village and handed over to those old people. They have told Leena that she was rendered orphan, after her parents were killed. She stayed with them for two years when they decided to shift to Bombay to be with their son. That is when the accident happened. Now the question is why their son did not approach for collecting their bodies? Is he not aware of their death? Or did he fear the police will arrest him if he comes forward to collect the bodies or is it something else.

Let us assume they have traveled from future and the old people were killed in the transport. From what I have gathered it would be many years in the future when Sahithi would get pregnant and give birth to Leena and she would be three or four years when she would have gone back to the past from there. Will there be technology at that time in the future to time travel or they have encountered the kind of wormhole I have read. But the theory is not fitting our way of life. One thing we were staying separate for a long time. It does not seem like we will be staying with them, except we lose everything all these buildings etc. Still, there would be her flat. Also, it does not seem like she knows about Atul and Reena. She behaves with them like they are younger siblings, not elder ones. She did not know about Sneha, she would have at least have seen her photo on the wall. She speaks about Sahithi going for a job and she did not say

anything about me. Was she not close to me? She just refers to me as daddy. It seems I am a very busy person and she is closer to her grandmother. From all this it does not seem like she is from our family. Then from where did she come? Did she come from another dimension or universe? Is it possible that such a thing could happen? From these scientific theories, it is possible. She could have come from another universe or dimension using these wormholes. It could happen such universes would not run at the same time as our own universe. She could have come from past or future to us. If so will she go back when the time comes or is she stuck over here forever? If we assume she will stay back here we have already provided for her, we are raising her with our other kids. We have provided for her future with other kids. So, it won't be a problem for her. The only thing is we have to be ready if she goes back to her time. I woke up in a jerk. Thinking about Leena, I must have dozed off. I got up looking around. I remember seeing the after scene of Leena's kidnapping. We got down from the car in front of the colony gate. Lot of people were around the gate. We pushed them aside went inside the gate. My mother was sitting on a bench and crying. Sahithi went to her and asked what happened? she said I couldn't find Leena. I brought her down to play on the swing. The watchman came and telling me someone asked for Kumar, I told him you must be on the way. I turned back and she was missing. I asked who was asking for Kumar. One man around 25 30 years old with a beard and moustache, was dressed shabbily, I did not let him come in and said I will check and came to the park. I know your mother in law would be here on Swings at this time. He must have come from behind me, I don't know how he could lift the baby and go from here in front of me. He must be having someone with him. I came out of the reverie and thought is this is the way Leena was kidnapped. From the watchman's words my mother would bring Leena every day to play on the swings. That means she was staying with them in the colony. It seems we are also staying with them. So, it must be from an alternate universe. Will these feeling travel through the universes? Is it because I know others from that universe I feel I have some people in my life whom I have already met and feel already had interactions with them. Take Nandini's case I felt when I saw her bedroom I felt I have met her there and we had spent the time on her bed. I even had an erection thinking about that and later she had gone away from me. She had broken my heart. It is not the other way. Take the case of Sunitha from the time I laid my eyes on her we were connected to each other and she even refused an alliance with my brother and stayed with me. Take Sahithi we connected from the time we met in Vakola, the spraining of her ankle is just a catalyst for our meeting. We were close from the time I met her on the paints company road. If we did not have a

connection, why would she come to my rescue when Sneha went away and took me to her flat and let me live with her. All these are connected somehow to our lives. How Leena and Sahithi connected to this story. What is their connection in all this? I clearly saw her breaking down after Leena was kidnapped. It was different with me as if I have anticipated something like this would happen. It seems I am a stronger person than this. As if I have seen lots of ups and downs. What was I doing or working as? We drove home in a car. That means we are well off, must be a good job. What kind of dress I was wearing then? I seem to remember meeting with Krishna and asking him to check something. What is it? Does he know about the kidnapper? Had he any interaction with them. Does he have any knowledge about this? What did he say? He said he would enquire with his friends. Why would he have any idea about this? Is the kidnapper from Vakola? Is he known to Sahithi or her family? So many questions and I never could get any answers to them. From all this, I could deduce Leena is my daughter with Sahithi maybe from another time or universe. Is Sahithi affected by these emotions from another Sahithi? Is it the reason for her mood swings? Is it the reason she was behaving like this. How long will Sahithi behave like this. Now Leena has been transported to us, will she ever meet her parents? Will that Sahithi will pine for Leena her whole life? Will it be affecting this Sahithi? How can I shield this Sahithi from those emotions? Is there a way to do that? If Sahithi accepts Leena as her daughter will that bring solace to that Sahithi? It is all unknown territory for me. Maybe it is also for those people who have written these scientific theories. I got up went out to have a fag. Sonu, Monu came to me wagging their tails. I patted them and moved towards the gate between our house and Loveleen's house. I went behind them and they entered Loveleen's front yard. I went towards Watchman's cabin. I got a prick behind my neck. I felt like someone is watching us. I went to the watchman and warned him that someone is watching us. Be careful of anyone coming over in the night. I will leave the dogs here in the night. Lock the gates and keep them locked. In the night close the gate between our house and this house. So, the dogs would stay in the compound. The dogs have made a round of the compound and came back to me. I went into the house. Loveleen is sitting on the sofa and she is rocking Dhruv in her lap. I took him from her and put him on my shoulder and patted his back. In a minute he went to sleep. I said to Loveleen when I entered the compound I felt like someone is watching your house. I made sure no one gives newcomers any house for rent. It seems they have been here for a long time. Or they could have brought a property around here somewhere. When they gategashed our meeting, I felt they know about our coming and goings. I asked Sahithi to complete your room in the new house first, so you can shift over

there. But now I feel we have to stage your going to Delhi. We will plan this way you get yourself driven to the airport in your car and you act as if you are going to Delhi. From there I will pick you up and possibly you can stay in Sahithi's flat for some time. Then I will somehow smuggle you back to the new house. I feel they are going to gatecrash your house and ask you about Guru's death. Because we are going to create a rumor about his death, it might turn into something else and they want your opinion on that rumor. If you are in Delhi it would be different. If you are here they will start hounding you for information. We have to plan it in such a way they would be confused about where you are? Finally, Loveleen said you do what you think is necessary. I will follow your lead. I gave Dhruv to her and came out of the house. I lit a fag walked back to the house.

Sunitha

After finishing the book, I was reading, I went to the library for another book. Kumar is not there in the room, it seems he went down for his fag. There is a book on the table, it seems he is reading it when he left the room. I lifted the book and look at its summary. It is a scientific theory book on wormholes. I picked up the book and marked what he was reading and sat down and started reading from the beginning. I have read probably ten pages when Kumar came into the room. He said you are reading about wormholes. I said if you want to read it take it. He said you can read it, I have done reading with that book. I asked you have finished reading the book. He said I have read enough, you can read it, I don't have a problem.

He sat down in his chair and switched on the system started typing something on it. I read for another half an hour and put the book on the table. Kumar got up and prepared two cups of tea and gave me one. He asked so what do you think about what you read up to now. I said nothing much, I could not understand much. I don't know how all this is possible? Kumar said I think Leena is an example of what could happen. I asked how? He said from what Leena says I am the father and Sahithi is the mother and my mother is the grandmother for her. Correct? I said from what she said I could deduce that. He asked how it is possible? We never had children that we know of. She was categorically saying she is being raised at my parent's house. There seems to be no way that could happen not in the foreseeable future. I said correct. Let us assume Leena came here from another dimension or universe all these could be possible. There in another dimension, all these could be possible. That Kumar and Sahithi could be married and were living in his parent's house. Leena could have been kidnapped

by someone two years back. By some kind of mechanism, we don't know anything, she was brought to this dimension. During this transit, the old people were killed or they arrived here and met with an accident. She must have arrived a second later and survived the trip. Now she was brought to Vakola Shakha and when I called he informed me about her and I brought her here. Now when Leena arrived here, I had felt a tap on my shoulder and found no one around. I felt very high anxiety and felt the kids were in some kind of grave danger. The anxiety only came down when she caught hold of my hand. All these seem to point to some kind of wormhole or time travel mechanism. I said if you are explaining it like that it seems plausible. He said now all this seems to have an adverse effect on Sahithi's mental condition. When we visited the doctor, I thought she was traumatized by the events in her office. But after all this time I feel she is being affected by the Sahithi of that dimension where her daughter has been kidnapped. I asked what can we do about this. He said we have to make her believe Leena is her daughter and she is safe with her. If she believes that then the other Sahithi should receive these mental emotions should flow back to the other Sahithi and she should become a normal person and those mental emotions should pass back to this Sahithi and she should become a normal person. I asked do you think all this passing of emotions is possible? He said in my dream I saw how the kidnapping happened and how she was affected by that. That means it is taking time from there to here to flow of the emotions or events. I asked if it is taking time how much time it would take her to become normal? He said at a conservative estimate it would take two years to four years. I said so much time, will she survive this much time? I said as soon as she recognizes Leena as her daughter fifty percent problem should be solved. I said it all seem puzzling. He said this all seems like a story from science fiction. It is all new for us. I had a weird feeling when I visited Nandini's house. She showed me her room, when I entered her room I had a feeling that I had known her before and she had broken my heart. I literally ran to my room from there. Later she came into my room and I strictly said don't enter my room. we spent ten days in Delhi but I kept her at arm's length. That is the reason after coming back she was spending her time at the hospital not in her office room.

What is he talking about? Did he just say Nandini approached him and he put her in her place? I have not seen her much after coming back from Delhi. It seems he is talking truthfully. He must be saying all this for my sake, but his demeanour says he is telling this from his heart. He must be scared of getting heartbroken after what happened with Sneha. We are together because he doesn't have any expectations from me and me from him. If he goes away from me I will only miss his companionship, I will not miss him. I think it would be the

same for him. We are in this for what is the word friends with benefits. He comes to me because he misses his nights with Sahithi and I did not find anyone else. If I find someone suitable person I might leave him and go away. It is my destiny that I could not find anyone else. He could have spent time with Nandini but he was scared she would break his heart. Did she really do that to him? Maybe at another dimension. Did he really believe that these other dimensions or alternate universes exist? From the time I met him at his kid's birthday, I am a changed person. His proximity changed me. For him, I stayed back at his house. I took leave and went away to solve the mystery of Sneha. I came to his house on that Sunday hoping Sahithi should not be there. As I hoped she was not there and we could spend the night. It is the start of our relationship. Slowly and steadily we came together after renting the flat he was there whenever I was available. He came to me whenever I asked. He waited for me to return to Bombay to be with me as I have. When the day for my return came, I was restless until I reached the flat. I think it is the reason I was wild on the bed. He did not tell me but I have seen him get tired trying to satisfy me. He must have told many lies to be with me. But whenever I called him he was there on the spur of the moment. What is that between us? Friendship? Companionship? What kind of relationship do we have. I said do you think we had some kind of relationship in those alternate universes. He lifted his head from the book he was reading and asked what? I asked do you think we had some kind of relationship in the other dimension? He thought for a second and said I assume we have some kind of relationship there. But I never had that kind of premonitions about you. When I saw you that day I felt a connection to you, that is all. I think we never had serious problems between us. I feel if something serious happens, then only we will have our mental emotions get transferred. Maybe they can happen at different times. Maybe I am catching these emotions of only particular wavelength. I am not sure how all this works. I have been having disturbed sleep for some time. Sometimes I wake up with a jolt. Sometimes I feel someone is waking me up. But mostly I don't remember what I saw in my sleep. Sometimes I vaguely remember what I felt. The aftermath of Babri Masjid incidents I had a premonition and I clearly saw what happened on that day at quarters. I even warned the Sena about them. They could not do much about it. At least we have escaped unhurt when we went to your hearing. I think they did not still recall you? Were they paying salary to you? She said they are paying half salary now. I don't know when they will finalize all that. If they finalize something at least I could resign from the job. I have settled down on this job. Else what could I have done? I said god must have heard me, that's why he let you work with me.

I think he has a point there. It must be my destiny to work with Kumar. Otherwise, why would I be suspended for no mistake of mine? Why the bomb blasts had prevented me from attending the hearing. Those hearings have taken me to the mouth of death and it was the last-minute intervention by Kumar, that has brought me from certain death. I think I have been saved for Kumar only. He had been seeing the bad omens from the time of Babri Masjid's demolition. He must have endured so much during all these times. He still has those nightmares. He still does not feel safe. He showed me the notes he makes daily of the nightmares and the emotions he feels after getting those premonitions. It is a blessing in disguise or a curse. He feels so much pain he sees those things and he can't do anything about them. Only up to his personal level he can act, when it is about general nature he becomes helpless. If he can't change anything, why would he get those premonitions? What God is telling him? You should endure all that is thrown at you, or you are a silent spectator in the grand view of the cosmic things? He is trying to understand what all these things mean. Because he is an avid reader, he is trying to understand by reading about all these things. If he had not been a reader, what he would have done? I think he would have become a reader. Some things are imprinted in one's genes. I also like to read. I prefer crime, mystery, maybe a little romance. How are one's hobbies determined? Some people prefer sports. Some people prefer music. Some people like me read and write. I always feel I have writing talent. I should start to write something, if no one else reads them Kumar would read and give his opinion. What about Leena? He is saying she is his daughter but not his own daughter. It is like saying he is a brother but from another mother. It is not actually that, but with the same meaning. She is his daughter but from another universe or dimension. How does that sound? If Sahithi hears that she would say you must have got her from someone else. You are trying to rub her off on me. She may even accuse her of being my daughter. For that to happen we did not even meet at that time. At an estimate, we should have met at least a year before we actually met. At least I am safe from that accusation. If she says that I could say I would have brought her with me to their home at that time. I was working and I would not dare do that to myself. If I had a child I would not be working as an air hostess. So, she would not dare accuse me of being her mother. Who else she may accuse, I don't think Kumar had anyone else in his life. Sneha was dead by that time, Sahithi was nervous of childbirth. How he will convince her that she is Leena's mother is his lookout. According to his argument it would be to her advantage to accept Leena as her daughter. If she becomes normal would he leave me and settle down with her or would he continue our relationship like this. How long can we continue our relationship?

As per his estimates, it would take her two to four years for becoming normal. Would it be enough time for us? Will I find someone else during this time? If I continue working here, how will I find anyone else? When I am working as an air hostess, I did not find anyone, how could I find anyone else here. I think it was my conscious decision not to accept anyone else. If I leave Kumar and settle somewhere else, I might find the one I am searching for. I did not let my parents choose anyone giving my job as an excuse. If I give my approval will they search for an alliance for me? I stopped meeting them fearing they will bring up the matter of my marriage. I don't think I can be with anyone else after being with Kumar for this long. I will devote my life to him only. Whatever society thinks, let them think. I have not cared for my family, what will I care for society. At this time, it is only Sahithi who is between me and Kumar. She has her own problems to cope with rather than think of me as her opponent. Why did she accept me to stay in her house if not she knows she could not give him what I am giving, mental peace? Why did Sneha went away in the first place? Because she suspected him of infidelity when there was none. Her cousin himself told Kumar sorry for taking her away by telling lies. So, it was the act of her grandparents who tried to separate them. Sahithi has seen him going to pieces after Sneha went away. She might be fearing what will happen to him if she tries to separate us. That could be the reason she was keeping calm. She suspects us of having an affair, but could not say it out loud fearing for his mental state. That could be the reason for her acting like this. But what about her having a problem at her previous working place. It is not the reason he asked us to go and meet the purchase manager. Yesterday the purchase manager was eager to please his boss. He offered us the order for decorating his house. Let us see what Nishitha comes up with about him.

Kumar asked something, I lifted my head from the book I was holding and asked what did you say? He waited a second shook his head and said nothing. My train of thoughts being broken I put the book on the table and got up. I said I will return back in a minute. He looked and said do you want to have tea as if he is going to make tea. I said yes, prepare and I will come back. I went to my bathroom relieved and came out. Kumar is standing in the middle of the room. Surprised I asked him what are you doing here? He said I came for you. I said someone will come, what they will think? He said I locked the door, no one will come. Let us have a quickie and started to kiss me. I could not resist and I cooperated with him. Satisfied he dressed went out of the room with a book in his hand. I locked the door dressed and sat on the bed thinking about the experience we just had. What is his age? He is nearing thirty and I am twenty-six. We are in the prime of our life. He still goes three rounds in the night

without much effort. He understands my needs and acts accordingly. He is not selfish in bed. I heard from my colleagues and friends, how their boyfriends or husbands leave them high and dry. I never talked to them about my experiences thinking they would say I am lying or get jealous of me. I am proud to say he is a marvellous lover in bed. Sometimes he says I am draining him, but it is his own fault, he would not leave me with one round. He might be fearing when he will get his next chance, he would have at least three rounds. Nowadays it is different, we are under the same roof and we can't meet whenever we need. So, he leaves with a quickie but it is satisfying to me. How does he do that?

I got up and went to the library, he was waiting with a cup of tea in front of me. I picked the cup and started sipping. I looked at him, he is not very handsome, he is just five feet five and a little dark not very dark. But he has some charm in his face and his confidence shows in his face. He must be wearing his spectacles for a long time, it has become a part of his face. Those bring respectability to his personality. Overall, he looks like an ordinary guy when you first meet him, but his intelligence there can be no par to that. His intelligence combined with his ability to look into the future has brought him to this level. Three of the four bungalows in this area are owned by him. That itself is an achievement. He started two companies and he has more than 20lakhs in the bank for his company. Only twenty-five percent of office space is used at present. So, he can expand the company with just three developers he is running the company. He has combined three companies for income tax purposes. He is vacating these two bungalows for renting to movie making. How does he get all these ideas? Now We have to live with Loveleen. How did he convince her to shift to live with us? Or was it her idea to stay with us. I think she got her father to purchase the house for this purpose only. What will she achieve by coming to stay with us? It could only mean one thing, she wants Kumar to act as a father to Dhruv. That could be the reason he was called to Delhi, to give the papers to the new bungalow and to ask him to look after Loveleen. All these properties were given by her father as a gift to Kumar, why they would give all this to him. What is his relation to them? Just for helping win elections, would they do that? They must be in a desperate position to win the elections. Now they purchased these four buildings, next what they will do? I heard the next building belongs to Asha Parekh, would she sell that? I don't think. Maybe they will look at properties' opposite to us. Kumar was getting nervous about people spying from those buildings. He had warned those property owners not to rent it to new comers. What if they are already brought those properties. What could he do? He already got Mr. D'Souza in his grip by offering his daughter a job to teach kids and Chitti. He offered him commission to get orders. He was giving leads, I had

to calculate his commission and give him some money, otherwise, he may think his leads are turning into orders and not get anything back and stop bringing in leads.

Kumar said if you have finished drinking tea, you can put the cup down. I put down the cup and looked at him. He is looking at me from the rim of his specs. I looked at him and a laugh escaped from me. He asked why are laughing? I said when you look from the rim of specs, you seem funny. He got up and said I will just come back. He must be going for his fag, I also got up and said I am also coming. He asked you are coming for a fag? I said no, for a walk. He said then come. We went out to the compound, he lit a fag and is looking around. I asked whom you are searching for? He said I am looking if anyone is spying on us. She asked why anyone would spy on us. He said because is Loveleen is staying with us. They must have seen CM's PA come and go. They would be thinking why did he come? I asked him why did he come? He said in a whisper there was some problem in the political ranks, he came for advice. I asked him did you give advice to him. He said I told him to create a rumour that Guru was killed by the CM. I exclaimed Guru killed by CM? He said no, I want a rumour to spread that the CM can raise to any level if he can punish his son in law with death, what he can do to his opponents? I asked is it just rumour. He said just a rumour to scare his opponents, who wants to remove him from the CM's chair. I asked where do you get these ideas? He said I was following Guru from the time of our first Delhi visit. He is not a good man, but he was killed by the opposition party. It was his foolishness that got the opposition party's downfall. I asked how so? He went to them to offer bribes and Dimple. We had recorded the conversation and I pulled Dimple in nick of time. They have used the conversation of the bribe to make the minister resign and it led to the elections. Due to our software predictions, they have won the elections. Now the party in power had to sit in opposition. So, to take revenge on Guru, they got him killed. Now with the rumour either they will come out and say they killed Guru or let the rumour spread on. If they come out they killed Guru it will be their funeral. The CM can use it for political mileage, he can say to get the truth out, he got his men to tell this lie. If they let the rumour spread then it will silence his distractors from coming out in the open for fear of their life. It is a double-edged sword. Heads we win and tails we win. The only thing I am fearing is that they might attack Loveleen with journalists of tv crew. So, I want her to be shifted from here. I will plan for tomorrow to send her to Delhi. I asked wouldn't be in Delhi might be more problematic? He said it is just enactment, I want her to be shifted to Sahithi's flat. I kept the flat for this kind of emergency. I said you always think about the future. He said to keep ahead of one step, we have to look into the

future and plan accordingly. I know you are intelligent but I did not know you are political person. He said I am not a political person. I said you may not work in the front but you work in the background. You know how all this works out.

Completing his fag, he threw the butt on the floor and snubbed with his chappal. He said let us go inside. We went back to the library. On the way we looked into the kid's room, they all are sleeping. I looked out for Chitti, she is also sleeping with them. I looked at Kumar, he understood my look turned towards my room.

Kumar

Sunitha gives subtle hints. Seeing Chitti sleeping she gave a hint we should head to her room once more. I was back to my old times when we used to spend time in her flat. We went to her room and we started to go slowly at it. We must have spent half an hour, tired we rolled out on the bed. I asked her how is it. She replied it was the best half an hour I spent with you, how do you do it? I said it is all because of you, I am lucky to get a partner like you, hope we will never get separated. She said don't jinx it.

I said I will head to the library got up dressed and opened the door a little and looked around, no one is present. I opened the door head to the library. On the way I looked into the kid's room, Chitti just sitting on the bed, do you want anything anna she asked? I said I just looking for the kids. Ready them we will go to the beach. She got up and woke the kids up saying let us go to the beach. Atul asked can we have ice cream. She said you can have anything you want. I went to the library and sat down. I picked up the phone called Loveleen and asked her we are going to the beach with the kids, do you want to come with us? She replied she will come. I said get ready and come to our house. I went back to Sunitha's room, knocked, and opened the door. She is sitting on the bed looking at the wall. I thought she must be thinking something. I asked I am taking the kids to the beach, are you coming? She said yes. They can fit in the car as they can hold each a kid on their lap. I said then get ready and come to the kids' room. I went to our room washed my face and changed and went to library sat down.

We have returned from beach after 8 pm. Sahithi is in the hall going through some papers. I told Chitti to take the kids to their room and change. Sahithi asked do they need dinner. I said I think they will go to sleep, they had something at the beach. We brought you something to eat. I going to have a bath and change. Come after having your dinner, I will be in bedroom. I went

had a bath and dressed and sat on the bed with my back to the head. I picked the book from the night stand and started reading.

Sahithi came into the bedroom after half an hour. She went to the bathroom for a bath and came after changing. She came and sat beside me. I put the book aside and looked at her. I was in two minds to talk to her about Leena or not. Finally decided to tell her. I asked what do you think of Leena? She said what is there to think about her? She is like one of the kids. I said she is your own daughter. She asked what do you mean? I said I am telling you she is your own daughter. She asked how that can be possible? I said I think she was thrown from the future. She asked how that could be possible. I said I will tell you something don't take tension. From what I gathered she will be born to you somewhere in the future, maybe two to three years later, not later than 1998. She will be kidnapped at the age of one by someone from Vakola. Why Vakola I went to Krishna enquiring about the kidnapper. So, he must be from somewhere around your parent's place. I don't know what kind of enmity he had with you he with his accomplice kidnaps Leena from Wadala colony park when my mother takes her to play on the swing. I think she was being raised by my mother because Chitti may not be in our lives anymore. She must have been married by that time. So, my mother takes her daily to the colony park to play on swings. One day someone kidnaps her from the park by diverting the attention of the watchman and my mother. She was taken to some village where his accomplice's parents live. They were some old people who raise her for two years. Due to some problem in their village, they decide to shift to Bombay to their son's place. When they landed in Bombay something happens and they land in this timeline. Maybe due to some anomaly, they get killed when they land here. Leena must be a second or two behind and she is saved. The bodies were handed to Sena Shakha and he informs me about Leena and I go and fetch her. Now the problem is your future self is getting affected by missing daughter which is affecting you. Now understand this carefully to get yourself treated you have to treat your future self. To do that you have to accept Leena as your own daughter and you have to feel your daughter has been returned to you. How you are picking sadness from your future self you have to send back peacefulness to her. If she can pick up your peace then her mind will settle down and her sadness will evaporate. When she becomes normal you will become normal. Go now and hug Leena, you should feel peace enveloping you. Think your daughter has returned to you, this is the only way you can save yourself. I got up from the bed and took her to the kid's room. Seeing us Chitti got up and asked any problem? I said Sahithi wants to see Leena. Chitti said she is sleeping. I said no problem, she will just have a look and

go. Sahithi sat down beside her and took her in her lap. She moved a little and went back to sleep.

Sahithi

When Kumar explained how Leena landed in our house, at first, I did not understand, then I thought if that could be possible. If he just said She is my daughter I would understand. She behaved as if she is my daughter and Kumar's mom as her grandmother. It seems she will be raised by her. How she could land from future here? He must be reading from morning about that only. He must have found some references for this kind of happenings. Still, I feel like a dream what he explained. But the real change happened when I took her in my lap and looked at her. I felt a kind of peace descent on me. Like gods are blessing me. I closed my eyes repeatedly told myself, my daughter is returned to me, my daughter is with me. When I felt I had become my former self, I put down Leena on the bed touched her back until she is sleeping peacefully. I got up and we went back to the bedroom. Kumar sat on the bed with his back to the head of the bed adjusted the pillows on his back. I sat beside him, put my chin on his shoulder and my hand on his chest. I said I am feeling peaceful. Let us try for Leena. He said let us wait for some time, I don't know what will be the effect of her in our lives.

Kumar

When she said let us try for Leena, I was taken aback. I did not think she would be changed this fast. As I had already two rounds with Sunitha, I decided to postpone it. I patted her back until she slipped into sleep. I put her head on the pillow and got down from the bed. I went to the library and lit a fag. It seems my theory is working on Sahithi. Now I have to make sure she will not have a Leena from her womb. I don't know what kind of effect it will have on present Leena. I don't think Leena was born to this Sahithi. Then our life would turn upside down. We will lose everything and we had to go to my parent's place to live. I think it would another Kumar from another dimension who is living with his parents. Another thing she would have remembered having elder siblings. She treats them younger siblings. So, her behaviour and her background story do not fit with us. So, there is no urgency for us to have a Leena in this dimension. Even if Sahithi has another daughter we need to have a different name for her. I only told her Leena is actually her daughter to gain traction with her. I don't believe she is actually her daughter. She believed Leena is her daughter and she had a change of behaviour, that is all I needed. Let us see how this plays on.

I snubbed the fag in the ashtray and went back to the bedroom and lay on the bed.

After a long time, I had peaceful sleep. I got up and readied had breakfast and went to the office. I called Loveleen and asked any news from Delhi. She said she will call and find out what is going on. I cradled the receiver.

I went to Mahira's room she has not yet come. I looked in Sunitha's room, she also did not come. I looked at Nandini's cabin it is empty. I went to the developer's cabin it is also empty. I think after Pauleen I am the first to come to the office.

The telephone rang and it is Loveleen she said the rumour has started to spread like a wild fire. I said it is time for you to go to Delhi. You take your driver to the Airport and when he leaves I will reach with my car and we will go to Sahithi's flat. You be there for some time and I will pick you up in the night and get you back to the new house. She said I will check the plane schedule to Delhi and will start accordingly. I put down the receiver.

There is a call from the purchase manager. He said he had gone through the offer letter and he got the approval from the MD to go ahead with the computerization. When will you give cost estimates? I said we have to check the level of computerization required by you, based on that we will give cost estimates. I will send someone to check the computerization and then we will give the estimates. He said you do that. I asked did our people come for interior design? He said he had talked to them and he is expecting an estimate from them. I said ok and cut the call.

I thought whom I should send for estimates. I think Rajesh and Mahira should attend this, as they have already worked together, they can do that better than Sunitha and Rajesh. I called Pauleen and asked her to send them to me if either Rajesh or Mahira comes to the office. The telephone rang and Loveleen said she is leaving for the airport. I said Now it is 11 am and I will be in parking at 12:30 pm. So, come over there at that time. Tell your driver to get back to the house, don't let him loiter or wait there at the airport. He can go anywhere else like his home, that would be ok, he will not be needed for two to three days at least. She said ok and cut the call.

So, I have around one hour before I need to go to the airport.

There is a knock on the door and I said come in. Mahira and Rajesh came together. I told them they need to go and meet the purchase manager. They

need to verify the level of computerization needed and take requirements for costing or both software and hardware. They can take the bike as I need the car. They went away as the keys would be with the watchman.

I waited until 12 and went to Sunitha's room and told her I would be going to the airport to pick up Loveleen and put her at Sahithi's flat. I took the car and instead of going towards the Parle side went towards the Khar side to cross over to the east. Then went over to the parking and waited for Loveleen to approach. I saw her coming out of the gates and waved her. She with the help of a porter got her luggage came and sat in the car. The porter put the luggage in the back. I tipped him and we went to Sahithi's flat. I parked in the parking and took my luggage and we went to the flat. I opened the door. And took her to the bedroom. I said I will bring Nishitha in the evening until then can she stay here? She said she is comfortable here you can go. I looked into the fridge it is well stocked and fresh milk is available. My brother must be visiting regularly. I told her my brother might be visiting tell him to give me a call. I will see you in the evening and went down and took the car and drove to the office.

I parked in the office parking and went to my room. I rang up Sahithi and told her to send Nishitha to her house as Loveleen is there and send her to give company to her.

I checked with Sunitha and asked her shall we go for lunch. We both went to our house for lunch. Completing lunch, I went to my office room. I checked whether Rajesh or Mahira had returned. They have not returned, so I went and sat in Sunitha's room. I told her what we discussed about Sahithi and Leena seems to work out. She was feeling better in the night after having accepted Leena as her daughter. She just nodded as she understood what I am saying. I asked her do you want tea. She said yes. I told her to come to my room and got up and went to my room and sat down. She came after ten minutes. I prepared tea and gave her one cup and took one cup. Completing tea, I rinsed the cups and placed them in the stand. I locked the door and came and stood before her. She loosened my trousers and she gave me a blow job. I stood her up and pulled her up and turned her other side. I pulled her dress up and pulled her panties down and entered her from behind. She bends over the table and we had completed our act and she adjusted her dress and sat down. I adjusted my trousers and sat behind the table. She went back to her room and I lit a fag and smoked.

Around 4 pm Rajesh and Mahira returned. I asked them did they had lunch. They said they had lunch in the cafeteria. I asked them about the report from their computerization. They showed a rough report. I looked through and asked

Mahira about computerizing their typing pool and secretaries. She said she did not check about them. I said before preparing the hardware requirements you better check them up. We should get orders for another ten or fifteen systems and printers. She said she will do that before sending them her costing for systems. I said now sit with Sunitha prepare the costing for computerization and give me a report. They went away to prepare costing.

I sat back in the chair relaxed and thought if we get this project we should be in the green for this year. I have to check accounts and profits for this year, so I can adjust the expenses and profits for tax purposes. Before the end of the year, I had to sit with the CA and finalise these tax matters.

I went back to the house and checked whether the kids have returned from school. Chitti with the driver and went and brought them back. I kissed each of them and went to the library and called Sahithi to enquire about the Loveleen's room in the new house. She said it might take another day for it to be completed. Now I can't go and bring her back from Sahithi's house. I rang her and told her she had to be there for at least another day. She said ok, I have got Nishitha to give company.

I picked a book started reading it.

I got a call and I lifted the receiver and said hello. It is Loveleen and she said your brother had come. Here speak with him. He said hello, tell me. I said Loveleen need to stay at the house for one or two days. We are going to shift to a new house. It would take another one or two days to prepare the room for her. She had some problems in the political circles and need to keep away from her house. As soon as her room is ready in the new house, I would pick her up. He said no problem let her stay here, I will go to Wadala to stay. I said if you don't have any problem you can stay there. She will have some company, otherwise Nishitha had to give company. If you stay Nishitha can go to her house. He said ok, I will stay the night. How are the kids. I said they are playing. You come to the housewarming, it will probably be next week. I will tell father and mother also when the date is fixed. If you want a room or something like that here tell me I will reserve a room for you. We have good number of rooms here. If you need office space I can provide you. Tell me if you need anything. He said ok if I need anything I will let you know. I cradled the receiver.

I called the house and father lifted the receiver. I said we are shifting to the new house beside Loveleen's house. We are vacating the houses for giving on rent. If you need a room come and check and give instructions on how the room is to be done. He asked when shall I come? I said any time before the weekend. We

are probably having a housewarming ceremony next week. If you instruct Sahithi she will get it prepared as per your liking. If you tell me I will send the car. He said then send the car tomorrow evening around six pm. I said I will do that and cut the call.

I went out to the compound and lit a fag made a round of the compound and then entered Loveleen's house. I went to the terrace and looked at the houses in front of the house. Trying to find anyone is spying on us from any of the houses. There were some windows facing our house but the curtains were drawn. Must have seen me and drew the curtains. I think if they want to buy any more properties around here they should buy these properties.

I came down and went back to the house. By the time I reached the kid's room, Sahithi had already come and sat with the kids. I went to the library and sat down. I checked the server if they have updated any documents. They have updated the partial document

Nishitha

Kumar's brother Ram came to the house and opened the door with his keys, he must have been surprised seeing us there. He said sorry I did not realize you were here. Loveleen said Kumar brought me here, he told you to call him if you come home. She called Kumar and gave him the phone. He spoke and cradled the receiver. He said to Loveleen Kumar is telling me to stay and give you company. She said ok, then. I said to them I will go and bring you dinner and went over to my house. By the time I returned Ram had made omelets and removed a bottle of whiskey and placed it on the table. I placed the dishes on the table and sat down beside Loveleen. He asked me do you want a peg? I said no, I don't drink. He brought two glasses and placed them on the table and poured whiskey into the glasses. He asked Loveleen what is the problem Kumar is talking about. She replied it is not much of a problem. He said tell me we have the whole night in front of us. So, she started narrating her story. Loveleen said she was born and brought up in Delhi. Her family is well to do and their grandfather had some businesses. Her father was from the beginning was politically motivated. He had been in the student's union from the time of his college. Her grandfather never objected to him instead he encouraged him. When she completed college, her grandfather had fixed her marriage with Gurvinder Singh, his family is in some businesses and they thought by marrying her to him they would get some business help. After their marriage Guru brought her to Bombay saying he is planning some new businesses in Bombay and he has some investors. He had helped her set up an interior designing firm

also. But physically he had kept her at distance. She did not understand what is his problem. Then one day he had organized a party in their backyard which is facing the sea shore. She tried to avoid the party but he called her to the party. During the party, one of his guests came up to her and started flirting with her. She avoided him and went to her room and locked the door. After the party Guru came to her room in a drunken stupor and beat her mercilessly. The next day she complained to her father, then her in-laws. What he had told her in-laws, she does not know but he went away to Delhi and stayed there. She was continuing to work here and improved her business. She asked her father to get her divorced many times and he refused to heed her request as it will create problems with his political future. When She told Kumar about her problem he had done a sting operation on Guru with the help of Dimple. In the sting operation, a minister was caught and they forced him to resign which led to the collapse of the government which in turn led to a change of the leadership, and subsequently, they had to dissolve the assembly and go for elections. With the help of Kumar's software and predictions and analysis, they had won the elections and her father in appreciation of his help had given him these bungalows, bonds and asked her to help him in his business. He also got orders from Maharashtra Sena and Hospital software through his own. He again helped the party when a minister was trapped using a woman. Then the minister offered a software order for his help. Now last month when Guru was killed and he was beside her during the transition. Now some people in their party started to campaign against her father, by saying he can't save his own son-in-law what he can save the state. At this time Kumar came up with the idea rather than defending his position, he should go offensive and asked them to start a rumour that Guru was killed on the orders of CM. According to Kumar, it will have two effects. One is that CM is ruthless when punishing the wrongdoers and he will not even spare his own son in law. This way the rumor will silence anyone who is against their party. He said it is a double-edged sword. Heads we win and tails we win. Now the rumour is spreading like fire and he fears that the journalists who had come to their board meeting will return to her house asking for her comments on this rumour as it is about her husband's death. So, he brought her here in the guise of sending her to Delhi. She concluded by saying Kumar suspects someone is watching her house. So, he said he will take her to the new house when it is ready.

I have not known about Loveleen previously. I was thinking what her relationship with Kumar. It seems he had helped her in her personal life. The side effect is winning the elections. He must have done a number on them to give all this wealth in such a short time. It must be three and half years from the

time they have won elections. We were there when he got the present office bungalow and he announced that he will start the software firm. From that time, he had got two more bungalows. Why they were gifting him the bungalows. It must be to keep him close to her. The second bungalow he must have got after helping the minister. The third building he got after Guru's death. How they have all these buildings. They must have purchased the buildings one by one. Sahithi ones told me how Kumar met Loveleen. She had hit him with her car and he had fallen down from his scooter. As he was going slowly, he had not been injured and she gave him his card and went away. The next day he went to her firm and befriended her, he must have thought she would come in handy if he needed any help financially. He got her to help Sahithi. Then he helped her with her husband. But what is this talk of punishing Guru? What did he do to her now that he required punishment? Whose child is Dhruv? Is he Guru's or someone else? Did Guru have something to do with that? Did he get her raped by someone so Loveleen got pregnant? Is that the reason for punishing Guru? That must be the reason for his death.

Loveleen asked Ram you and Kumar don't seem to be close, why is that. Ram replied when we were small we used to play together. He used to be with me always. Then when I was in 10th and he was in 8th, our father went away to work somewhere else. He was given house management. He was looking after the money, household, etc. My mom was dependent on him totally. I failed in the 10th and I had to rewrite the exams. That is the time we moved apart. Then we went to Vizag for a year, he was in 9th and I was rewriting my 10th failed exams. He made new friends and he played cricket with them. Then next year we went to our village, where I joined in 1st year intermediate and he was in 10th. I was with my cousin brother who is in 2nd year intermediate and I spent all the time with my cousin. Next year we went away to Bombay with our parents and sister and he joined in the intermediate in Vijayawada and stayed with our grandfather. Then the remaining story, you know. He loved Sneha there in the college and he joined a college in Hyderabad and eloped with her and married her and he returned to Bombay after two years of marrying her. He was a changed man by then. We never connected again after that. I had to make sacrifices for his sake. You know then we had a very small house and until he came I was sleeping in the front room. When they came over father got a partition installed in the front room for them. Then I had to sleep in the backroom and work there. He again changed when Sneha went away. Still, he did not look up to me to help him. When Sahithi entered into his life he went away to stay with her and we had changed our house. I had some relief. Then I started my own electronics business and became independent. I know he was

working in the factory until he started a software company. From you, I could understand how he achieved all this. You have a lot of influence in his life. Loveleen said it was not me but Sahithi and Sneha who had a lot of influence in his life. He worked like a donkey in the factory for Sneha, when she left him and went away Sahithi took him into her life gave him a place to stay and a reason to live. Then he changed his lifestyle he stopped working like a donkey and become smart working. When Kirit had a run-in with a gang of cheaters he went and got him out of that tricky situation. Kirit and Mahira owe him for that. He has proven that he would do anything for his friends. Then when the chance came for opening a software company he made them partners in his company without any expectations from them. He told them if you have confidence in me then only invest with me. Otherwise only nominal amount would be enough to continue as partners. He made us all directors in the company. He would call board meeting to discuss any changes or to take up any projects. He would ask each one of us for their inputs. One time when the company is flush with funds, he even offered to return their share else he may suffer losses in the future and he may lose their money. None of us have the inclination to withdraw from the company. We all have so much confidence in his working. He comes up with such an ideas he offered to run our marketing division from his company, so we can move our profits around for income tax sake. Our business has tremendously increased after he took over the marketing. We could not cope with the work his firm is bringing. He started a new company in the name of kids for their future. He put all the three building in that company and we would be paying rent to them. So, they will be secure even if something happens to us. He looks to the future. Might be the death of Sneha in an accident has changed him to look into the future and secure the future of the kids. Overall I was very satisfied with his lookout. It seems Dhruv woke up, I will go and look.

Kumar

I told Loveleen's watchman to switch off the lights in her house and lock the house and gates and sit. It is around 9 pm the watchman called me that some people were knocking on the gates and were asking for Loveleen madam. When he said she is in Delhi they were not believing her. What should I do he asked? I said open the gates and let them check out themselves. Don't allow all of them just one person to check. Lock the other out. He said he will do that. I went to the gate separating the properties and looked into their compound. He is telling them if they want to check the house, he will only allow one person only. I let the dogs into their compound else they may attack him. They started barking at the visitors. He told them don't try anything, these dogs are fierce they will not

leave them if they caught them. He let one person enter and locked the gates. He caught hold of the dogs and said to them to stop. They stood calmly looking at the person. He showed him that the house is locked and no one is there in the house. All the servants are given holiday. If you want I will open the lock. He said he wants to check. The watchman opened the lock and said to him don't try anything. Don't try to run, these dogs will not leave you. He took him and showed him the house and they both came out. He said to the people waiting at the gate there is no one here. One of them asked what about the other houses. He said there are works going on in the other house. If you want to check this house you have to take permission from their owner. I went and stood at our gate looking at their gate. One person came to our gate and said I know you we had come to you about the minister. I said what I told you then I will say again. If you want to check anything you have to give it in writing. He said it is not worth the trouble and went away. I called up Loveleen and said they have come to check for her here. They might have found she had not reached Delhi. She said they are having good time. Nishitha brought dinner for them and they are about to start dinner. I told her to have dinner and I will pick her up tomorrow night.

I went to the dining room. Chitti is placing the dishes on the table. I must have come at the right time. I asked where is Sahithi? Chitti replied she went for a bath, she is coming. I said what the children are doing. They had their dinner and sleeping. I washed my hands and sat down at the table. I asked where is Sunitha? Chitti said I will go and call her for dinner.

The phone rang and I picked the receiver and said hello. It is Loveleen and she said I spoke to Delhi when you said some people were looking for me. I said ok, then. She said the rumour has reached such a level that they were telling them that I had been raped by Guru or one of his accomplices and Dhruv was born out of that. It is the reason my father got angry and got him killed. I said don't take anything in the mind that is with the rumours what level it will reach we will never know. I think we are getting the reaction we anticipated. Take care and cut the call.

I had anticipated something like that will come out. That could be the reason they have reached her house for her comments. Now they will think I hid her from them, she is not reachable. It is one-way correct way to act. She should not talk to them, what is the truth only known to her. Let the sleeping dogs lie.

Sunitha came and stood beside me and asked what it is? I said the rumour has reached such lengths that now they are accusing Guru of getting her pregnant through someone and knowing that her father punished him. She said that is

the reaction you wanted. I said something like that I anticipated. Let us have dinner, come. We sat down and Sahithi also came and sat down in the chair.

I told Chitti to switch the tv, I wanted to watch the news. She switched on the tv and changed to the news. At last, the news I was waiting for had come on. In a news clipping, the journalists have cornered and asked the CM about the rumours that he had got his son-in-law killed. He chided them by saying don't talk rubbish, they are just rumours. He does not know anything about that, the case is being investigated by the Delhi police, they should ask them about it. Then they went and enquired with the Guru's family. They said they don't have any idea what is this about. They only know some business rivals have got him murdered. They don't think the CM has any hand in it. He is not that kind of person. They don't think Guru could have done something like that, which deserves such a punishment. The newsreader said you have heard what they have said it is up to you to draw conclusions.

I looked at Sunitha, that is the expected reaction she said. Sahithi having no clue what is happening, asked what happened? I said there is a rumour going around that Loveleen's father got Guru killed as a punishment for something he did. The journalists were asking about that to him and Guru's parents. She said ok as she understood. After finishing my dinner, I got up to wash my hands. The phone rang Chitti went and lifted the phone and spoke and said Anna it is for you. I rubbed the hand with a towel and took the receiver from her. I said hello. It is CM's PA. He said with concern in his voice that now the rumour is coming back to Loveleen madam. I said don't worry about it, let it run its course. I think madam can take care of that. I made sure she can't be approached, so she don't need to say anything. If she says anything it will be misinterpreted, so it is better not to say anything. Don't worry about anything, everything will work out as expected. He said ok then and cut the call.

I went out and lit a fag and looked around the compound. I went to the Loveleen's compound and went to the watchman. I looked out from the gates, did not feel like someone is spying. I said to him to relax, lock the gates and sleep. I told the dogs to come with me and went back to the house. I snubbed the butt of the fag and went to the bedroom and sat on the bed. I picked the book on the night stand and started reading it.

Sahithi came and sat beside me. She started talking to get my attention. I put the book down and looked at her. She seemed to want me to give her attention. She might be thinking about why I have rejected her advances last night. Might be she wants to prove to me that she is a changed person. I looked into her

eyes, I could see the lust in those eyes. I switched off the reading light, pulled her to me, and kissed her. Having spent I rolled over her. I adjusted my clothes and lay on the bed. I looked at her, she seemed to be enticing, she said you seemed to get older, you were not like before. I know over time I have improved and I have not lost the touch. She must be pulling my leg, I said do you want me to show I how good I have become. She said no, it is enough for today, go to sleep, and turned to the other side. I got up went over to the library lit a fag and sat on the chair looked up at the ceiling. I did not think Sahithi's change would be this abrupt. If she is feeling like this how the other Sunitha might be feeling. If the other Kumar is something like me he would go on his business as usual. Or would he break down like I did when Sneha went away? I think each person is his own. What did he do when Sneha was taken away from him. Did he go behind her like me or forgot her and married Sahithi. How did he meet Sahithi? It seems Sneha was not in his life otherwise Leena would have had some idea about her. Did he still stay with his parents when I had gone to stay with Sahithi? What that Sahithi would do when she finds she could not meet her Leena forever? Will this Sahithi's feeling will have soothing effect on her? Can we ever know what her real feelings are? I completed the fag and snubbed it on the ashtray. I got up to go back to the bedroom. Sahithi came and asked what are you doing? I said I am having a fag. She said your smoking has increased, look after your health. I nodded my head and said come on let us go to sleep.

Sahithi

When Kumar told me, Leena is my daughter only, I felt he is lying to me about her. I thought maybe she is born to someone he spend time with. Like in a movie when the boy's mother dies the hero brings the boy to live with his family. But from the time she entered our house, she was calling me aayi and his mother as Naanamma for grandmother. I don't think anyone can coach such a small girl all this. She acted as if she knew about us. She seemed to live with Kumar's parents. When I picked up and put her in my lap I felt the mother love envelop me felt a calm descent over me. I wholeheartedly felt she is my daughter only. I put her back and came back to our bedroom. Then I remembered I had not been with Kumar for so long. I could count the time I spent with him. It was as if I had a block in my mind about him. Now when I showed interest in him he said to wait for some time. But today I halfheartedly tried to get his attention. He had satisfied me. At first, I thought he had lost the touch but he was his former self in bed. I teased him that he is becoming old now and lost touch, he was ready to start second round, I said it is enough for me and turned other side. He did not go to sleep. He got up and went out of the

room. I suspected he might be going to Sunitha's room, but instead he went to the library light came up and I waited for sometime and went over. He must have just smoked the room is filled with smoke. When did he start to smoke again in house? I chided him for smoking, he just nodded his head and said let us go to bed. What did really happen in the company, when Kumar advised me to get one manager to take me as a steno, I tried to each manager to impress. When I had worked with the purchase manager he had made me do all the works while working in the pool. But when I asked him to take as his permanent steno, he made fun of me for asking him, and also, he told other managers about my intentions. I was heartbroken by his actions. At the nick of the time Kumar took me to Loveleen. She offered to try me out for three months by taking a leave. I put up my papers and joined with Loveleen. I don't like to work where my talent is not recognized. Over that he made fun of me for asking to consider me as his permanent steno. Now I am a manager of a firm and I have been independently handing the firm. I even got an assistant in Nishitha. I have a car with driver to move around the city. I have a husband who is a business man unlike earlier factory manager. When ever I heard the factory manager I felt like factory worker. Because he was working like that only, without any free time and no rest. Sneha told it was worst before when they were living in Vakola with his parents. He used to save like a miser and overwork himself. It was better after he came to stay with me, he left the miserly behaviour at his parent's home. He became extravagant with me. He brought all the household things with out asking. He said he don't have any need for money. He must have meant without Sneha in his life the money has lost its value. From that time, he never looked back about money. He never asked me about my earnings. He never asked Sneha about what she is doing the money she gets from being a doctor. He did not care about the money again. When he got all this money he is still down to earth about it. He never showed that I am earning this much, I should be given preferential treatment. He is the same Kumar I met at the back road of the Vakola. He still behaves like that with me, friendly, serious, intelligent and caring. He cares about all his friends the same way. I would say he gives Loveleen some preference because she is suffering so much. She has so much money, still she has no mental peace. I would prefer mental peace to having lots of money. We lived well with little money then, we had lots of fun. We used to enjoy the company of each other until Sneha returned. Still he was spending more time with me than her. I made sure of that. Had she not dead would he be in this position? I think he would be, it is his destiny to reach great heights. He not only thinks about his day to day businesses, he thinks about the future and he makes sure we would not suffer under any circumstances. He

started a company in the name of kids just to safeguard their future. Even if we are not there tomorrow, they will be looked after financially. He uses people judiciously, Mahira was marketing director and when he thought she was not giving her optimum he moved her to the kid's firm and started using Sunitha for marketing purposes in the operations director post. As he expected she rose to his expectations, bringing the orders for our firm. We are so much filled with work, we need to employ more people now. I have to speak with Loveleen about employing more people in the office. We need more permanent workers. Earlier we were using workers on work to work basis. Now it would be better to have permanent workers else we won't have workers when we need them. Now where is she, Kumar said she going to Delhi, then he wanted her room in the new house to be readied urgently. Why I am not getting sleep? Kumar is sleeping so peacefully, I have not taken the sleeping pill, do I have to depend on sleeping pill for my sleep? I got up and took the sleeping pill with some water and lay on the bed. Maybe due to the movement of the bed, Kumar must have disturbed and said what happened? I said nothing you go back to sleep. He is always disturbed in his sleep. When Sneha went away he used to get up and sit at the dining table with a cup of tea. How would he get sleep if he drinks tea in the middle of the night? Sometimes he gets up with a jolt. He says he don't remember why he woke up with a jolt. I should forget all this and sleep. Kumar gave an idea for sleeping. Check the nostril where the air is moving, turn to that side and take rhythmic breathing and you will go to sleep. I should try that.

Kumar

I am getting disturbed by her getting up and sitting back on the bed. What is she doing, she must have forgotten to take a sleeping pill. I should go back to sleep I have lots of work tomorrow.

I got up suddenly and looked at the time it is five am. Why did I get up at this time? Normally I would wake up after six. Is it something to do with Loveleen? I called up the house. After trying two times my brother picked up the phone. He said hello. I said you take Loveleen and Dhruv and go to Wadala quarters, it will be more secure there. He said do you feel there is a threat here. I said I don't know, I am feeling a little nervous, you immediately take her to our parents. He said I will do that immediately. I put the cradle back and lay on the bed.

I could not get back to sleep, I got up and went to the library and sat down on the chair. Absentmindedly picked up a fag and lit it. Inhaled the smoke and thought what is happening around me. Why am I getting affected by what is happening around me? Do I have to be responsible for everyone? I think as long

as they are under my watch, I need to understand their needs and help them out. Let us see how this all will work out. Once we shift to the new house, we all will be together. I am sure it won't be like when Sahithi and Sneha stayed together. Because they have a kind of rivalry. It should be different with Sahithi, Loveleen, and Sunitha. Its each one is their own master. I have to see how it will be once my parents come to live with us. I don't think it will be anytime soon. But I am going to reserve rooms for them whenever they want to come live with us even for a few days. Let them enjoy themselves with the kids. I told them to come over today evening. I will send the car for them, they may want to go back as Loveleen is there. Or shall I let her come back here? She should stay in our house for the time being. They would not dare enter my house. How they returned without checking our house. Maybe they know she is not here. Somehow, we have to get her to my house. That would be the perfect solution. When the time comes for shifting she can go from the back gate into the new house, until she can stay here. That would be the perfect solution for the time being. I have to check what is going on in Delhi, when will the news start? Possibly at 8 am. I will go and have some coffee until then. I got up from the chair and went over to the bathroom, brushed, and went to the kitchen. Made a cup of coffee and went and sat in the library. I switched on the computer and started checking the requirements prepared for the Godrej. I made a rough estimate of the costing and it would come for around two lacks for the software. Our developers would be busy for at least six months. Is our firm top management heavy? We just have three developers and top management are myself, Sunitha and Mahira. Now Mahira is exclusively working with kids' firm, I can exclude her from the firm management. Even if we appoint more developers we don't need top management, that means we are not top heavy. Only we have lower staff thin. It would get rectified over time. As I am also working with developers I might get myself excluded from the top. That leaves only Sunitha as the operations director who is actually working herself bringing some business to Loveleen's firm. Overall, we are doing well with the limited staff we are using. I have to come up with something for Sena for the elections. I have something like a year to put my plans into action. I think they should concentrate on non-Maharashtrians for votes. They have to work in each constituency based on a combination of people. Some areas are Muslim-heavy. They have to identify and prioritize those people especially making them feel safe despite what happened after the Babri Masjid demolition and bomb blasts. The Sena has to target and work area-wise. I have to sit with Shakha Pramukh and prepare a plan for the next year. I noted down in my calendar what to be discussed with Shakha Pramukh. The next point is enquiring about Systems for

Stenos and typists. They can save a lot of time by correcting mistakes and printing them rather than typing the whole document again. We have to pitch it to them. They can save them in the server for access to everyone or store them safely in their systems.

I have to think about whom we can target for our software orders like we have done Godrej. We are already working on hospitals. We can target small factories as the tin factory, but will they understand the time being saved as we understood. It depends on the marketing people who are doing the sales. I feel our marketing people are not using correct sales techniques. Because people have an idea about Interior decorations so they are getting orders. Do we need to get some new blood in the marketing? The existing salesman can sell for Loveleen's firm. We need to appoint someone for software marketing. Then Sunitha or Mahira can follow up. I think I have to be behind these two to get new orders.

Sahithi came over and asked when did you get up. I said at five I felt a little uneasy and asked my brother to take Loveleen to Wadala colony. She asked why your brother. I said because he was staying at your house. She said oh, okay. I said then I could not go back to sleep, so I am sitting here working. Please get me a coffee. She said I am making for myself, I will make you one and went away. She brought two cups of coffee and gave me one. I said to her sit down. She sat down on a chair opposite to me. I said how are feeling now? She said I am feeling fine. I asked there are no problems at work? She said everything working fine. I said if you want any software for making it easy your work you tell me. We will help you out. There are some software to make drawing or things like that you should have some systems, I will arrange for them and you can get your people some training so they can work on them. Then what about the new house. How long will it take to complete the house. She said in one week it should be done. I said I have asked my parents to come in the evening, they will have a look at their room and how it should be decorated. She said ok. Then give my brother a room, if he wants to come and spend some time with us, he should have a room like our parents. If you want you give your parents a room also. I think this house is big enough for all of us. It has more rooms than this house. You provide our parents ground floor rooms. My brother you can give first floor room. You see how everything works out. You also provide some guest rooms on the first floor. If any relatives come over we should provide for them. She said I will look into all this. Let us treat this as our house and Loveleen will be a guest in our house. But you provide everything for her. Her servants will be in our employ from the time we shift there. Everything we will streamline

once we shift there. She completed her coffee got up and went away. I switched on the tv to watch the news. There was nothing new in the news except Loveleen can't be approached for her comments. I switched off the tv and got up to go for a bath. Completed bath dressed and came into the dining room.

Completing my breakfast, I took my teacup and went over to Sunitha's room. I knocked on the door. Sunitha called from inside who is it. I said I am. She said coming and closing the door. I entered the room and not finding her in the room assumed she is in the bathroom closed the door and locked the door and sat on the bed. Completing her bath, she came out with a towel around her body. I looked at her fresh face and got up and kissed her. She said hey what is this at this time. I said for kissing there is always a time. She kissed me and said let me dress, I am getting delayed. I asked what is the urgency? She said I had to complete the requirements and calculate costs and submit them to Godrej. I said Godrej can wait come here. She said what if Sahithi comes. I said she would assume I went over to the office. She came near me and asked what is it? I pulled her closer and kissed her on the top of her breasts. She removed her hands from the towel caught my head and pulled it near to her. Having lost the support of her hand the towel fell down.

I told her to dress up and took a file from the table and went out of the room to the office. If anyone sees me they would assume I came for the file. I went over to my office room and sat down, dropping the file on my desk. I thought about what I had done just now. I thought I would keep Sunitha and get Sahithi closer. So, if Sunitha stayed in the same house I would put her away, but now it feels she is coming closer than before. Earlier we used to meet once a week or fortnight. Now we are meeting daily and there is no restriction for places. Her room or her office room or maybe my room. Even when I have been with Sahithi last night I could not resist Sunitha. What is happening with me? Why I am feeling restless about meeting Sunitha and why I don't feel much for Sahithi? Is it to do with her beauty? Or is it do with anything else. When did this feeling of mine start? The day Sunitha came to our house when Sahithi is away with the kids? I thought then it was a one-night stand. We did not try to meet for another month. Must be when she asked me to get her a flat. When she left her parent's house and came to stay at the flat. It must be from that time. I used to wait for her to return from her trip. I would make excuses to go to meet her. I never felt like that with either Sneha or Sahithi. With Sneha, it was pure love. I felt like I could not live without her. I waited for more than a year to get her to elope with her. We were married and I endured so much for her then and until she walked out of my life. I think then my heart broke and I had become a

different man. My love for her evaporated into thin air. I must have become like a mad person because my heart is emptied of her love and it became emotionless. When Sahithi came over to meet me she filled a little emptiness in my heart, thinking she would fill my heart to the brim I went with her to her house. I think she never filled it fully. That could be the reason I had asked her for marriage. But marriage also could not fill my heart. When Sneha returned, she did nothing to fill my heart. She must be thinking my heart is full of her love. What she did not know is that her love had left my heart empty. That could be the reason I was not that much affected by her death. From the time I laid my eyes on Sunitha, I had some feelings for her. Without knowing she filled my heart to the brim. What Sneha and Sahithi could not do Sunitha has completed. Until now I was thinking Sunitha is just temporary, but she is irreplaceable. She is closer to my heart than I thought.

Sunitha came into the room and closed the door. She said what have you done when you went away Sahithi came over and saw me adjusting the saree and asked what Kumar is doing here. I said you came for some file. She asked did you open the door like this? I said I am adjusting the saree now, I did not feel I wore it correctly. She said to come for breakfast and went away.

I said don't take her seriously, she must be checking you. Do you want tea? She said I just had and came. I will be in my room preparing the documents. I said ok. I got up and prepared myself a cup of tea and sat down lit a fog and started sipping tea. As it is not hot yet I opened a window and had not switched on ac.

I called up home and mom picked up the phone. I asked did the Loveleen and brother reached home. She said they arrived around six am. I said I asked dad to bring you in the evening to see your room and give suggestions for your room. She said yes dad told me about coming to your place. I am noting down what we need in our room. I said when you are coming in the evening bring Loveleen and Dhruv with you. Let her look different something like your daughter in law and let her come with my brother. This way no one should recognize her. I will arrange for her to stay at our house. Tell her this. She said ok we will do that. I cut the call by placing the receiver on the hook.

I closed the window and switched on the system. Did not feel like working and went and lay on the sofa and closed eyes. I drifted off to sleep.

Sahithi and Nishitha came over to my room. Sahithi touched my shoulder and asked are you sleeping? I opened my eyes and said I am thinking something. What happened? Nishitha said there was some kind of drama going on at Sahithi's house. I asked what happened? Nishitha said there were some people

came to the house and watchman has objected to let them in. When they did not hear he had called the secretary of the complex. He came over and said any one had to take his permission to enter the premises. He will not let them enter without permission. He asked them what your purpose of coming here. They said they were looking for a person and it has come to their attention that person is here in this building. He asked who is that? They refused to reveal any more information and he asked them are you police. They said no. He said then you have no right to demand entry into the building. When they did not let them in he called police and police came and told them to go away and they put a couple of constables for security. I said he must be having some influence. Sahithi asked why did they come to our house? I said they were looking for Loveleen, to get some comment from her. Sahithi said she was there yesterday. I said I had shifted her to Wadala quarters in the morning. Sahithi said that is the reason you got up at 5 in the morning. I said yes, we have to be one step ahead of them. She asked what if they reach Wadala. I said there is security there, outsiders cannot enter there. If they have not been invited by the residents no outsiders can enter. I will once again warn them. I called house and mom took the phone. I asked brother is there? She said yes, I told her to give the phone to him. He took the phone and I told him the happenings at Sahithi's house. Tell your watchman to be careful and don't let anyone enters the premises. You keep an eye on the entrance. He said I will tell the watchman to be careful. Tell the president to put extra security as they might gatecrash. He said he will inform them. I cradled the receiver. I said it is okay now and they went away.

I remembered the kidnap scene where mom was crying about kidnapping and we just arrived there. It might happen with Dhruv also. I called again home and mom took the call. I told her I had seen a dream where Leena was kidnapped from the park while playing on the swing. You don't go anywhere with Dhruv and close the door and don't open it for anyone. Don't let anyone come near them. She said they will be careful, I will tell Ram and cut the call. They must be thinking why I am calling for their safety this many times. I only know what kind of jam Loveleen is in. If they find her they not only grill her about Guru, they will take photos and we don't know what they will write about Loveleen and Dhruv. My main concern is Dhruv, it will have a profound effect on his future. Loveleen can manage anything, that I am sure. Let us see how far this goes. If they have come to our house, where else they may go. Will they know about my parents house? We can't know for sure.

Sunitha came with the requirement documents for Godrej. I looked at the requirements and made some changes and asked her to prepare cost estimates

for these requirements. She said she will sit with Mahira and Rajesh and prepare the cost estimates.

I went out and lit a fag and looked around. I went through the gates to Loveleen's house and enquired with Watchman, if any one had come again. He said no one came here. I said look around if any one is watching the house. You keep your eyes peeled.

I came back to the office room and prepared myself a cup of tea and sat down at the table. I called Nandini and asked about the client who wanted to visit their hospital. She said he had come and looked at the software and he is impressed with the working of the software. He said he will give you a call after getting approval from their management. I said I will wait for him to call back. How are you doing? How the works going on at Hyderabad. She said I am doing fine. The works at Hyderabad are going on at a brisk pace. I will call you for the opening ceremony. I said I think it would be another six months. She said yes. I said come and meet sometime. I think we are shifting next week, come for housewarming ceremony. She said she will certainly come. I said ok, see you and cut the call.

I thought why did I have that feeling of heartbreak when I saw her bedroom. I know I have not visited their home previously. Why did I feel that way about her? Did it have to do something with another dimension? Am I getting these premonitions and dreams because of another dimension or universe? What about premonitions about Loveleen? It is to do with this world, what it has to do with other dimensions? If it has to do with this world, then what about Nandini? Was it a warning for me to stay away from her? If I get closer to her, it's a warning for me that she leaves me with heartache only? There is a power in this world, which is warning about impending doom. Why did it not warn me when Sneha died in the accident? That power did not expect her death? That could mean she was not destined to be dead and it is an accident or it was a fixed event and it could not be changed. That could mean I would only get warnings about the events that could be managed.

I looked at the time it is nearing 1 pm, lunchtime. I got up and went to Sunitha's room. She working on the system. I said let us go for lunch. You can continue once you had lunch. She said one minute. I stood in front of her. Seeing me standing there she saved the work and got up and we both went to the house.

Completing lunch, we returned to office. I stopped outside lit a fag and looked around. Then I went to my office and sat down.

I opened the hospital software and started to look for any bugs. I have been going line by line. Running each screen and checking to see how that screen works with different options. It is on the reprint screen I found a major bug. The screen runs like this, the operator clicks the view button enters the voucher number then the data of the voucher is shown on the screen and the print button is enabled. If the data is not found then the print button is disabled. The problem is where the data shown and each column on the screen should be locked and disabled to make any entry. But the patient id no not disabled. The operator can enter the patient id and the patient name changes on the screen, if the print is clicked the voucher is printed with a new patient id. It could be a major bug because it will enable the operator to issue multiple voucher printouts on a single payment and he can pocket the money. I checked other screens and they are all same with patient id is not disabled. I called Nandini and explained the problem it could create. For the time being, told her to take some action that they could not re-print the vouchers. She can disable reprint option for the operators. We will correct the bug and update the software there. I called the developers and gave them a warning about letting this kind of bug go unnoticed. Asked them to correct it immediately and update the software in the hospital today itself, before any operator found it and uses it for his own needs. They went away.

I looked at the time it is around 4 pm. I called Sunitha and Mahira asked to come for tea. By the time they arrived, I prepared 3 cups of tea and put them in front of them. After having tea with Mahira I went out to have a fag.

I called the driver gave him precise instructions to go to my parent's place. I told him to go on SV Road towards Dadar and cross to East over the Dadar Flyover and go to Dadar TT from there to Wadala Bus depot and turn left before the Bus depot and pass the Wadala market and he will reach the P & T Quarters. There my brother will let you inside the gate. You take a U-turn and be ready to leave when everyone sits in the car. He went away and I called home and informed him about the driver coming there to pick them up. As soon as dad reaches home they should start from there. Don't forget about the instructions I gave in the morning. She should be brought into our house masquerading as his wife. If somebody is watching they should think some guests are coming to our house and it's not Loveleen. He said he will take care of that.

By the time they reached our office, I told the driver to drive into the office parking, it is getting dark. We made the office grounds a little dark and they went to our house through the connecting gate. I am sure they would not try to gatecrash our house. Everything settled down for us. I asked Sahithi to show

them the rooms allotted to them and make whatever changes they want. My brother is very enthusiastic about getting himself a room at our house.

I sat with Loveleen and asked her what is going on in Delhi. She explained how the rumour has turned and came back onto her. I said it would give her father good reason to punish Guru in the eyes of his distractors. Let us see how this plays out. I don't think on this point the central leadership would take any kind of action on him. She said that is true, they don't dare do something on this now. I said I hope everything works out in our favour.

I asked Loveleen is Dhruv is walking? She said he catches up things and moves a little. If we catch his hands he would walk. I asked did he talks? She said words like mama he speaks. I told him mama and he repeats mama. I let the kids play and went and sat in the library.

I looked at the notes on my table. I noted down to meet Shakha Pramukh.

I was checking the document Sunitha prepared when Sahithi came to ask to come for dinner. I said I am coming and closed the document and got up and went behind her to dining hall.

Mom, dad, and brother with Sunitha were already sitting at the table. I went and sat on a chair. I thought when was the last time I had sat for dinner or lunch with them. After coming back to Bombay with Sneha I had not sat with all of the family for eating. The last time I remember was when in village and father came for a visit and we sat down in the night for dinner together. I remember that because dad scolded me for eating too much pickles. Now, my sister went away after marriage. I said we are having dinner together after a long time. Mom said yes after a long time. I could not remember when we had dinner together. I concurred with her. It seems my brother Ram and Loveleen got connected in these two days. He is sitting beside her at the table and was explaining the dishes to her and generally biting her ears. I didn't worry about Loveleen because she can take care of herself. If she wants to be friends with him, I don't have any problem. What is my relationship with her? We are just friends. I know how to be within my boundary. I always keep boundaries with ladies. It's like they have to approach me, not me them. Sneha, Sahithi, Sunitha all have approached me first. Loveleen had hit my scooter with her car and gave her card to me and asked me to meet her. Then, when I forgot her she came over to my house in the guise of seeing the children. She has asked us to have a party at her house. She took to me to Delhi for setting up the office. She is the one who hit on my nerve by crying and made me help her with Guru. From that time, I

was planning for her one way or other, I am being rewarded that is another matter.

Sunitha asked my mother how is Kumar when he was small? She replied these two were very naughty boys from their childhood. Kumar jumped from the cradle when he was months old, and once he walked away to a market when he was 2 years old. Some good Samaritan brought him home. These two used to do a lot of silly things and get scolded by their father. These two used to create playful things that used to be a rage with other children and they used to perform theater on the terrace and used call all the children from surrounding areas. Their Diwali preparation needs to be separately mentioned. They used to take my father's medicine stone and used to bring all the ingredients from the market and prepared crackers. So many things like that.

Sunitha asked when they are so close, why now they are so apart. Kumar was in 8th and Ram was in 10th, their dad went away to work outside the city from then on they started to grow apart. Then we went to Vizag from there to the village. They slowly started to grow apart. Earlier they used to fight for small things later they stopped fighting altogether.

After finishing my dinner, I got up to wash my hands. I went over to Loveleen's compound and lit a fag and asked the watchman how is it going. He said everything seems ok, no one has come over. Finishing my fag, I snubbed it with chappal and came back to my house. Went over to the library sat down. My mother brought some books and put them on the table. I looked up at her. She said these are for your library. Sahithi said you are having a library here. So, I brought some of your books from the house for you. I said ok, thanks. I will check them put them in its place. Do you want some books? She said if you have something new then give me. I said these books you may not like, check this shelf we have James Hadley Chase and Perry Mason books here. If you have not read any of them, you can take them.

She took some books from the shelf and sat in front of me. She asked you have a beautiful house here, why are you shifting there? It is not as beautiful as this one. I said that house has more rooms. I want us to shift from these two bungalows and want to vacate them to give for rent. She asked why to give for rent when you are using them? I said I am not just renting, we are renting for movie production houses. We will get a good rent and these will be used until we find some use for them. I put all the four buildings in the name of children. These buildings are in a kind of trust and whatever income we get will be in the name of the children. I and Loveleen put up five lakhs each as capital to run the

kid's firm. We are supplying computers with that money. Even something happens to us, kids will be looked after. She asked why are you talking like that? I said we don't know what happens in the next minute. Did we think Sneha would die in an accident. I am just being careful. You don't have to worry about us. Check Ram, he seems getting smitten by Loveleen. She said it is not like that, he is just helping her. You were helping her all this time, were you smitten by her? I said it was different between us. I am helping her and getting paid for it. It is a business relation with us. How do you think we got these three houses? It was all hard work, I did not earn them in any illegal way. We have all put our hard-earned money into the company. We also got good return when we sold the hotel off. It looks like a short time but I have been putting in my hard work from the time I came here from Hyderabad. Sneha's grandparents sent some money as her share, I put the money in children's name. I am trying my best for the kids. She said you seemed to work very hard, take some rest. Ram was telling you called up at 5 am to bring Loveleen to our house. You seemed tense about Loveleen, these days. I said I have called him at the right time. I could not go back to sleep then. Later I had a shut-eye in my office. Once these things get streamlined I can have some rest. She got up saying ok, you take care, goodnight. She went to the hall maybe to watch some tv.

Among the books, there are Ramayana, Maha Bharath, Bhagavat Geetha, etc. I put them separately, I have read these when I was small. May be reading now they may shed different light.

I continued to read the ones I am reading. After some time, I went over to the hall and sat on sofa. They were discussing some business matters. Children are running around. Sunitha must have asked what software can we make? They were giving suggestions based on their experiences. I was not listening to them my mind was somewhere else. Suddenly I got up from the sofa and went out of the gate and went to wards the way to the beach. As I was walking Mr. D'Souza came to me and was telling me something. I said to him to come with me. He was walking with me and talking about something. Nothing was going into my mind. I went into the opening opposite D'Souza's house towards the beach. There was a dim light from the opposite side buildings. I went to the beach near the water. My legs touched something. I looked down and it was a lady and I checked her pulse. I told D'Souza to go and call for an ambulance, she is alive. Until the ambulance arrived I gave her first aid. I tried to remove water from her lungs by giving CPR. When the ambulance arrived, I let them take the lady in. I gave them my card if they needed further information for the police. I sat down on the sand and asked D'Souza to tell me what he was talking. He said he had to

get some payments. I said Sunitha is looking after that, he should ask her. When his daughter's exams finished tell her to come and meet me. I will give her full time job. He asked me how did you know the lady was in the water? Did you see her from your building? I said no, I had a bad feeling and I came over here to check, without knowing what it is. Then I found her lying there and rest you know. Who she might be he asked? I said I have no idea. I lit a fag and too a drag. I asked him do you want one? He said he did not smoke.

A constable approached and asked are you Mr. Kumar? I said yes. Did you report the lady who had drowned? I said yes. He said our SI sir has told me to pick you up and bring you to the station. We have a jeep waiting I can take you there. I said I prefer to come in my own transport, Mr. D'Souza please come with me. I will pick up my car from the parking. We walked over to the office parking, picked the keys from the watchman and I drove behind the jeep to their station. I entered the station and he took me to their SI. He told us to sit. Si asked me so, you have an office near where you found the lady? I said yes, we have our house side by to that. What were you doing there he asked? I said after dinner as my family came over I came out to have a fag. I was walking in the beach and I almost fell over her. I checked her pulse and asked Mr. D'Souza indicating him sitting beside me to call for an ambulance as she has a pulse. He asked how do you know she has a pulse. I said after seeing her body there, the first thing I checked is her pulse. He asked do you know how to check pulse? I said I had worked in grandfather's clinic for two years, I know about pulse and first aid, etc. So, what did he do, indicating Mr. D'Souza? I said he has a house in front of the entrance to the beach. I know he has a phone, so I told him to call for an ambulance while I gave her CPR. When the ambulance came, I handed her to them. Do you know the name Jocelyn Fernandes? I said I never heard the name. He said she was reported missing two days back by their family. I said I see. If I see her I might recollect something, but I don't think I heard the name. Ok, let us go to the hospital and see, how she is. Her family wants to meet you. I said let us go. We came out and seeing me getting into the car, he asked what kind of business do you do? I said software. He said ok, then follow us. We followed them to the hospital. He took us to her hospital room when she was kept. Outside the room, her parents are sitting on a bench. Seeing us they got up and asked did you get any information? He said we are enquiring. He took me to look at her. I looked at her she seemed of average height. Round face, a little dark. I shook my head and said I never laid my eyes on her. We came out and I asked his father who is she? He said she is our daughter, we call her Joy. She has returned from the USA sometime back. She was married there and her husband was torturing her and with the help of her friends there she escaped

from him and came over here. She was staying with us and she went in search of a job and went missing after her interview. What was she doing there in the USA I asked? He replied she has done MS there and was working as Software Engineer. I said oh, ok. The SI said when you said your business is Software, I thought she might have come to your firm for the job interview. I said we had not called any job interviews. We are just starting and we have very few projects. If you want you can check with Vakola Shakha Pramukh about us, we are helping him with some software works. He said we will do that, can you give him his number? I said I don't have it with me, the phone book is at my office. If you want I can call and get it. He said no need, we will meet him personally to enquire. He showed the father the card and said is it where your daughter went for the interview? He looked at it and said no the interview was at Cuffe Parade. The SI said to him she was found behind their office on the beach. He said is it so. Is he the one who found her? The SI said yes and gave her first aid and called for an ambulance. What did the doctors say? The father said they said she should be ok in a day or two. Now she is under anesthesia and she was put on ventilation. I gave my card to the father and said you call me with updates tomorrow. If I get some free time I will come and visit. I asked the SI can I go now. He said if we need further information will call you, looking at the card. I said fine and left with D'Souza.

I drove back to the house and parked in the office parking and let D'Souza go to his house. I went to my house through the gate. When seeing me Sahithi asked where did you disappear. I said I went to the beach and found a lady who almost drowned. We called an ambulance and sent her to the hospital. We went to the hospital with the SI and came back from the hospital. She asked who is we? I said when I found the lady, D'Souza was with me. He was asking about pending payments. I looked at Sunitha and asked is there pending payments of his? She said last month's payments I have cleared, this month's payments I will give on first of Feb. I said ok. Father asked who is she? I said I don't know they call her Joy and she returned from the USA because there was some problem with her husband there. I think her husband has something to do with her drowning. I have done what I could have done. It is not our headache.

I asked Sahithi did the children sleep. She said I think they are sleeping, they are in their room. Dhruv is also there with them. He has become super active after getting to walk. He runs with the others. I nodded my head to that.

I sat down on the sofa. There is a movie running on the tv, I looked at the tv.

When the time came for sleep, Loveleen said they should go and sleep in her house in the guest room. I took them through the gate and asked the watchman to open the door and showed them the rooms and returned back. I went to the bedroom and sat on the bed with my back to the bedhead. After five minutes Sahithi came over and sat on the bed. She cosied up to me and sat beside me. I looked at her, she seemed to want to have sex. But I was not feeling as I was feeling with Sunitha. I would get aroused by the touch of Sunitha. Sahithi started to press her chest on my hand. I adjusted and lay on the bed. She lay beside me putting her hand on my chest started to rub on my chest. Then she started to come down to my crouch to arouse me. When I am aroused she started to ride me until she is satisfied and rolled aside. I did not utter a single word, I reached and picked the packet of fags and lit a fag. I inhaled the smoke and let it out. Looking at the ceiling I completed the fag and snubbed it in the ashtray. I looked at Sahithi she is sound asleep, maybe pills have helped her.

I waited for five minutes, I got up switched off the lights and went over to Sunitha's room, and knocked lightly on the door. After a minute Sunitha opened the door. I went in and locked the door. I asked her are you asleep? She said no, I just changed. I asked where is Loveleen. She said she is sleeping with the children for today. Chitti gave her place to her and she is sleeping on the floor. I went and sat on the bed. She came and stood in front of me. I said I will never get tired of you. In what way she asked? I said looking at you. She came closer and I caught her by her ass pulled her closer. Having satisfied myself I rolled off her and lay beside her. She said you were a little different today. I said Sahithi had a go at me, I did not get satisfied and I cam to you. She said oh, that is the reason you were a little aggressive with me. I got up dressed and said bye and came out of the room.

Sunitha

I felt odd about Kumar's behaviour in the bed. I asked him that. He replied Sahithi tried to seduce him and he was not satisfied with her and came to be me for comfort. What that could mean? It could be only mean one thing he would be coming back to me even with Sahithi being normal again. I don't know I have to be happy or sad. Do I have to be happy that he would return to me for comfort or to be sad because Sahithi is coming in competition with me? Let me deal with one thing at a time. Tomorrow I have to go to Godrej for submitting the quote. Let me get a good night's sleep.

I got up a little early and readied myself and dressed up. I heard a knock on the door and opened the door. It is Kumar with two coffee cups in his hand. He said

I am coming with you to Godrej for submitting the quotation. I said ok. He handed me the cup and sat down on a chair. I thought he came over to my room like yesterday. But he acted normal and also he did not lock the door. I heaved a sigh of relief that I don't have to dress again. I took the coffee and started sipping it. He picked a fag from the cupboard and lit it. I asked your parents have come back from Loveleen's house. He replied I don't think so, I have not seen them since morning. I asked what are your plans for today. He said first we have to visit Godrej, then we have to visit Shakha Pramukh and if we get time we might go and visit the lady who almost drowned. I asked which hospital she is in. I said she is in Nanavati Hospital. I said yes while returning home we can visit the hospital. I will print the quotes and be ready. He said have breakfast and go. I said I print them and come then we can have breakfast and go. He said why don't you print in the library? I said good idea, why I did not think about it, I was thinking I have to go to office to print them. Let us go.

He snubbed the butt and picked the cups and we both came out of the room. His mother must have just come from Loveleen's house. She looked at us coming out from my room there is an expression on her face and Kumar must have understood it, he said I went to give coffee to her and discuss today's agenda. She nodded her head and went away. I asked him why you are giving an explanation to her? He said I know my mother, she wants to ask why are you coming out of her room? So, I said we are discussing business. come let us print the quote.

We went to the library and printed the quote and put it in a folder and came to the dining room. Chitti came and placed breakfast on the table. We completed the breakfast and came to the hall. Before anyone can ask Kumar said we are going to meet a client, then will go to Vakola Shakha to meet Pramukh. Did he have the sentiment that if anyone asks where are you going when going out the work will not be successful? It might be the other way he might be explaining to them because they want to ask but could not ask because of their sentiment. He knows his parents very much. He did not want to hurt their feelings and give explanations beforehand. That could be the reason he could convince them to let him marry Sahithi when Sneha went away. He must have got the habit of handling people from this. He said dad if you want help to go to the office let Ram drop by bike or Loveleen's driver can also drop by car. You can decide how you want to go. He said I took leave for the day. We want to spend the day with the kids. He said ok then, we will come back and we went to office parking.

Kumar sat in the car and looked at his watch and said we are not early? I said by the time we reach there they will be in the office, I confirmed the timings. He

said ok and started to drive. We reached the Godrej and parked and went to meet the purchase manager. We handed the quotations and Kumar said this quote for typists and stenographers. We are offering them at a discount. I know how much they suffer because they had to retype just for a small mistake. He asked did Sahithi told you. Kumar said from my personal experience I am offering an extra discount for them. These prices are only applicable for typists and stenographers systems. We can't supply other systems at this price. I am paying for them from my own pocket. He said ok, I will speak with our MD and let you know. We came out of the office and sat in the car. I asked are you really paying for the discounted prices. He said no, these are specially made for typing work other are made for application work. This way he will consider upgrading their typewriters to computers. How long will they suffer the typing?

We went over to Vakola from there. Seeing us, he got up and shook hands. I had already met him many times. He asked me what has brought you to our humble Shakha. I said we went to meet a client and came from there. He said please sit down. Will you have something to drink, perhaps tea? Kumar said tea is ok. It seems he will be there for some time to discuss things. My estimate was correct Kumar gave him some reports and they were discussing the strategies for around 3 hours. He was showing the reports and explaining the area's composition of people and how they should be handled. Shakha Pramukh was noting with a pencil Kumar's observations on those reports. Kumar's understanding of the people was very much evident from his discussions. He was offering something for an area and something else for another area. He must have spent a lot of time understanding the people and their requirements. In one area people wanted a bakery as they could not get pav in their area. Some area people were demanding a temple because someone has damaged it during the riots. Things like that can be done before the elections and where it can't be done now can be used in promises. He has covered the Bombay area in his reports and said he will prepare similar reports if these were successful in the next six months. Then they can take up similar works for the state. It seems Shakha Pramukh is very impressed with the observations and said he will immediately speak with the leaders and will start implementing the observations. I am sure I have not wasted my time and money engaging you. Thank you for everything. Kumar said what is thanks between friends.

Next, he explained finding the lady on the beach and calling for an ambulance and his further interactions with the police. He noted down the police station name and said he will have a chat with the SI there. Kumar got up and said we will go and meet the lady they said her name is Joy. He said ok and got up and

shook our hands and made a call. It must be to his leaders. We came out and sat in the car. I said it took a long time for this meeting. He said we have to give value for the money. Without asking he sent us a ten lakhs cheque and gave the hospital project. If they come to power we can expect some good projects from them. They have a lot of clout in Bombay and also in Maharashtra.

From there we drove to Nanavati Hospital through Vile Parle. On the way we purchased some fruits and a flower bouquet. We parked the car and he picked the fruits and I picked the flower bouquet and went to the lady's room. Her father is sitting beside her on a chair. Seeing us he got up and said come in and said to Joy this gentleman took you out of the water and called for an ambulance. She said thanks. Kumar asked did she tell you what happened. Her father said she could not remember what happened. Doctors said she got retrograde amnesia. She could not recollect that day's events. She did not even remember going to the interview. I was just standing aside and listening to all this. I looked at her and said hey Joy it is you, I could not recognize you with all these pipes and all. I turned to Kumar and said she and I are friends from school. We went to the same junior college also. Her father said you chat I will go and bring some tea and went away with a flask. Kumar sat down on a chair and I sat on the edge of the bed and asked her what happened, you have changed a lot, you seemed to have aged 10 years since I last saw you. Joy said I went to the USA to study MS and there a senior was behind me. By the time I completed my MS he has proposed to me and we married there with our parent's approval. After marriage, he started showing his true colors. At first, he started asking for money. I thought he must be having financial problems and I lent him money. Slowly he started pressurizing for more and more money. When all my money evaporated, due to his pressure I got liquidated my own assets. When he has run through the money he started pressurizing to get from my father. He was addicted to drugs and started harassing for money and started beating her with a belt. His company has removed him for his job finding him addicted to drugs. Then he became more aggressive, with any work he used to stay in the house and started selling house hold items. He pawned all my jewellery. He did not let me have any money, he would empty my bank account as soon as my salary arrived. I did not have money for filling my car with petrol. I had to hide my credit card and used to fill my car. One day he got hands on that also. Unable to go to office, I asked for help and with some friends helped me to reach India. Then I started to look for a job here. I remember I got a call from a company in Cuffe Parade and that's all I remember. I said I am sorry, you had endured so much, when I heard you went to USA for further studies I thought you were enjoying there, I did not know you were suffering so much. Joy said forget about

me I came back to India, what were you doing all this time. I said after my degree and I joined for air hostess and after six months training I was working as air hostess for Indian Airlines then Air India. Then I was suspended and when my hearing was on that day there was a bomb blast at Air India office and my records were destroyed and I am still serving suspension. Joy said so, you don't have any work now. I said no, no I am working with Kumar, he is my boss. Joy asked what are you working? I said I am Operations Director for this software company. Joy asked you are working in a software company? Get me a job in your company. Kumar interjected and said you become well I will give you some job, don't worry about job. I said see, you don't have to worry about job now. You relax for now, when you are well enough to work come and meet us, your father has the address. Joy's father came with tea in the flask poured two cups and gave us. We drank the tea got up and said will come later and came out of the hospital. I said what she made her life, if you can't raise your voice one should not marry. She should have stopped giving him money in the beginning only. He said until you face the situations you will not know, and started the car and reached our office.

He parked the car in the office parking got out and lit a fag. I said I will be in my room and went over.

Kumar

I looked out at the paan shop. Mr. D'Souza is chatting with the paanwala. I went over and told him your payments will be released on 1st Feb. He said thanks. I said I went to meet the lady we found. She seemed to forget what happened to her. I brought a pocket of fags from the paanwala, returned to the office. I went to Sunitha's room and asked her are you coming for lunch. She said yes. We both went to house and went to dining hall. Mom is supervising the preparation of lunch. I asked have you completed preparation. Mom said just a minute I will serve the lunch. I went and sat beside Sunitha at the table. Chitti brought the dishes and placing them on the table. I asked her where are the children? She said they went to school. I said mom and dad wanted them to be at house. She replied bhabhi dropped them at the school while going to the office. I said ok, then. I asked where is Loveleen? She replied she is sitting with Dhruv in children's room.

I completed the lunch and went to kids room. Dhruv is sleeping and Loveleen is sitting and reading a book. I asked you are also reading? She said I did not have any work so I picked a book from your library. These books are great time pass. I said that is the reason I always keep a book or two when I am travelling. If a I

don't have any work or to be waiting for something, then books comes for rescue. Ok, you continue your reading, I don't disturb reading people.

I went back to the office. I looked at the pending works. I called Nandini and spoke to her just chit chatting. Then called Kirit and enquired about his wedding date. Nothing to do I went and lay on the sofa and closed my eyes.

I said to Shakha Pramukh that I will give reports for the whole state. Bombay data I could get from various sources. But how could I get the whole state data? Or should I ask him to get this data from various places around the state? Yes, I should do that. He has to ask his various Shakha Pramukhs around the state to get the relevant information. This way I don't have to be involved in their data collection anymore. They could collect the data and they could take remedial steps. Whatever they could do, they should do it immediately and whatever they could not, they should make a list and offer them as promises for when they came into power. I think one problem of mine is solved.

The phone rang and I opened my eyes and got up and lifted the receiver. It is the SI, I asked to tell me what can I do for you? He said he was called by the Maharashtra Sena office, and they have explained how you have helped them in many ways. They have also told me you have some kind of visions and tell about the future. Did you see something about her? I said I did not see anything, I felt an urge to go to the beach, so I went and D'Souza came with me asking something. When I touched the body with my leg, I checked the pulse and told D'Souza to call the ambulance. He said it seems she could not remember what happened to her. It is better you come to the station and give your statement in writing. That way we can close the case with no clues to the suspect as the victim is suffering from Amnesia and could not remember anything. I said I will come over to give my statement.

I noted down what I have planned with the Maharashtra Sena, else I might forget it. I prepared two cups of tea and took them to Sunitha's room. I put one in front of her and sipped mine silently. Completing my tea, I went to the backside and lit a fag, and looked into the sea. It seems someone had thrown Joy from a boat into the water. At far some boats can be seen. Who could have done it? Did her husband come over to India? Did he take her out to the sea on some pretext and threw her overboard? Can we ever know what happened with her with her amnesia?

I went to the parking, took the bike and reached the police station. I gave my statement in writing and returned back to the office.

After one week I sat in the office looking at the accounts statements. We are comfortable for another year with our liquid assets and expenses for the firm. We are not very good as a software firm. Maybe I did a mistake starting a software firm. Because I don't know much about software development or marketing or sales. I only know management, so should I concentrate on management than thinking about development. But the developers are not taking initiative in the development process. Neither is the marketing team. I have to prod and give ideas for them to follow up. But with some luck, we are doing fine according to the accounts. We have profitability at 25 percent of the sales. We can expect some projects next financial year, possibly we should get the orders in the financial year-end. Once Nandini said normally the companies don't have budgets for the software and hardware. Once we approach they will make budgeting in the next financial year. So, for the sales of this year, we can expect some returns next financial year. So, the orders shall start coming in at the end of the financial year. If we get one or two orders we should be in comfortable positing for the next year. Remembering Nandini I felt I had to call her. I picked up the phone and called Nandini at the hospital. It took some time for her to pick up the phone. She said sorry I had been on the rounds. I asked how the software coming along. She replied it is almost complete, some small tweaks should complete the project from our side. I am planning to go to Hyderabad this month-end. I asked is the hospital ready? She replied the construction is complete and I have to go there and supervise the installation of equipment. I am hoping to start the hospital in the month of April. You should come for the inauguration of the hospital. I will send you the invitation. About the software for the hospital, I want the hardware to be set up by March-end. Can you arrange that? I said I will certainly arrange once you send the advance payment. She asked can you arrange the payments for the hardware and software from your end? I don't know the financial position at this point. I said I will certainly arrange that, send me the details of your requirements and I will arrange and personally will look into their installation. She said thanks. I said I have not seen you for ten days. Why don't you come over to our house warming ceremony in two days? We are having it this Saturday. We are having the party in the evening. She said I will certainly come over there. I said see you then and cut the call.

I made some more calls inviting the people to the party on Saturday. We can have another round of discussions with the people who are on the fence about the software. I have yet to get a call from Godrej. I have invited the purchase manager and their MD to the party. I will let Sunitha and Mahira call their contacts. Then there will be contacts for Loveleen's firm, I think Sahithi and

Nishitha will look after the invitations. I called Kirit and informed about the ceremony and told him to send his fiancé in the morning for the ceremonies if he did not have time to come in the morning and there is a party in the evening.

Completing my share of invitations, I prepared a cup of tea and sat down sipping. Sunitha came over with Joy, I told them to sit down. I asked Joy how she is feeling. She said she is ok except for not remembering what happened that day and thanks for saving me. I said it was my duty as a fellow human being and I know a thing or two about CPR and first aid. Four years with grandfather had come for some use. She asked how come? All my college life I had been with my grandfather who is a doctor by profession. For the first two years, I stayed with and studied. Then I called him to come and stay with me. I used to help him out at his clinic. Joy asked how come you came into this software development? I said it is my destiny to come to this line of work. After coming to Bombay, I was working in a factory as a Manager, one day I had some inspiration and started this software development. Joy looked at Sunitha as if this is true. Sunitha said yes, it is true. I had been with him all through this transition. I know him since 1991. I have seen his struggles and his rise to this level. It is he who goaded to me to join his firm leaving the air hostess job. Due to unavoidable reasons I had to leave the job and join with him. I don't regret doing it. I did not know then I could do this work. But now I feel I am more suitable to this work. She turned to me and said the reason we came here because Joy wanted a job with our firm. I know we don't have any openings with us but you have to help my friend. I asked Joy what were you doing in USA? She said software development. I thought for a minute, if I take her she can overlook the development team with her experience. I looked at Joy, she is looking at me expectantly, maybe with little tension which is evident from her face. I said if I give the team lead position can you do it. She said yeh, certainly. I asked what is your salary expectation? She said her figure. I was mentally calculating and checking with accounts, can we offer the figure. Seeing me thinking Sunitha said to Joy you know we are just starting, tell us what is the least of your expectations. Before Joy could reply, I said I will do this way I will pay 80 percent of what you have asked as salary and the balance 20 percent in Shares in our company payable at the end of the five-year period. So, after five years you will be a share holder of this company. If at any time you don't want the shares I will pay you the amount in cash. Is it agreeable to you? She said I am more than happy, I did not expect to be part of this firm. Sunitha told me so much about this company and you. Thanks for the offer. I will join immediately. Sunitha said she has another problem. She is scared to live with her parents. Her husband knows where they live and he may come to their house. She is scared to live with them. She is looking for a flat. I

said if she wants I can give the Sahithi's house. She can travel to and fro with Nishitha. Sunitha said that would be nice. Turned to Joy and said it is a two-bedroom flat at Vikhroli and Nishitha lives next building. Sahithi sends her car every day to pick her up. So, you can come to the office in the morning and you can ride back with her in the evening. If not Kumar will arrange for your transport for that time when Nishitha will not be available. I nodded my head.

They got up and Sunitha said I make her familiarize with others and work, and went away.

I thought she should fasten up the works in the development team. For the amount I am paying her she should certainly do the trick. I got up and went out to have a fag. Sunitha and Joy were coming out of Mahira's room. Mahira came behind them to leave them at the door. Seeing me she came behind me. Nowadays I put a packet of two in the backside for easy reach. She goes there to smoke. So, there was less interaction with me. But maybe she wants to talk to me about something, so she came behind me. I gave her a fag and lit myself one. I looked at her expectantly. She asked how much are you paying? I told her the figure. She asked don't we have to put it in the board meeting? I said I will mention it in the next board meeting, but I don't think there is a need for taking board permission for the appointments. However, we need more developers in the next financial year. I just appointed her a little early. Next month we have to install the software in Nandini's Hospital in Hyderabad. There will be Godrej and another hospital we are expecting. Nandini expecting hardware for her hospital in the next month. Make arrangements for the computers for her. We need them in Hyderabad, make arrangements with the dealer to deliver there directly. If we get these orders finalized you will be having more work than us. So, plan with the dealers for the hardware deliveries.

We entered the office and Pauleen said there is a call from purchase manager. I took the call there. He said he went to inform the MD about our party and the MD said prepare the purchase order for the software and hardware to your firm. We checked with the other vendors and your prices were very reasonable, and he wants the systems for typists too at the prices mentioned in the offer letter. I said thanks for the update and I will come and take the purchase order and start the work immediately.

I went to Sunitha's room. Joy and Sunitha were discussing something. I told them about the order and asked Joy to come with me to Godrej so she would look at the work do be done for them. Sunitha said she had a meeting with the salesman. I said ok and we both went over to the company. I introduced Joy as

the new team leader for the development team and she had seven years' experience in USA. Now they have to work with her for development. He took us to the MD and MD signed the orders. He gave us the order for Software, Computers for running the software and systems for typist pool at a discounted rate. I took the three orders and signed their copies and returned back. He presented me with advance cheques for the orders. We received the software cheques and hardware cheques separately as they are going to be supplied from different companies.

When we came out Joy asked is this easy to get the orders? I said we have been following up with them for two weeks. We had to use a special card with them to get the orders. She asked what is the special card? I said we had to tell them that in the next budget there will be a change of excise duty rules. Joy asked why would they consider that for giving us the contract. I said it is a piece of advanced information pertaining to the changes in the system, which will be affecting the whole country. They want to be the first to implement the system in India. We have just under two months for the preparation of their software. We have developed software for a factory, you take the software and make it workable for them. Can you do that? She said she had to look at the software first. I said I don't think it will be much problem for you, only thing is we have to be ready with our software before 1st April 1994.

I said to Joy I will take you to the factory where I used to work. There we have implemented our software and you can see it in working condition there. We stopped at the factory and parked and got down from the car. Krishna seeing our car came over. I reminded him about the party on Saturday night. He said he remembered it. We went to the cabin and I asked Krishna to show how to operate the software. I came out of the cabin and Kirit coming up the steps. He said I heard you have come. I said I brought the new software team lead. I asked Krishna to show the working of the software. Let us go and have a fag. We went outside the factory walked a little distance and lit our fags. I asked how everything going on? He said everything is fine. We finished the fag walked back to the factory. We went to the cabin. They have completed going through the software and were chatting. I asked did you complete demo. She said yes, I understood the software. We can return to the office. I said bye to them and we returned to the office. I left her with Sunitha and told her to choose where she wants to work from. The developers room has one more seat, she can take it or she can select a room from the rooms not used by others. She said she will check once before deciding. I went back to my room. Now Joy will supervise the developers and I only need to supervise her. I went back to the car took the

order and cheques and went and gave the cheques to Mahira to put them in the bank. I gave her the orders for the computers and told her to look into the deliveries.

I went over to Sunitha's room and handed her the purchase order copies to her for filing. Asked her to come for lunch. Sunitha said to Joy come let us have lunch. Joy asked where? Sunitha said in Kumar's house, I am also staying there and I have my food there only. Joy said I did not bring my lunch. Sunitha said no problem, there will be enough, come and got up. Joy got up reluctantly followed us to our house. Seeing the house Joy said ow! I thought Office only, house is better than office. Who has done the interior. Sahithi got it done said Sunitha. This house is only temporary, by next week we are shifting to another house. Joy asked why? Sunitha replied because they want to give this house for movie production. Joy asked another house would not be far? Sunitha said it second house from here. It has more rooms than these three houses. I will ask Sahithi to have a room for you there. If you are scared at Sahithi's house you can come and stay here. You don't worry about your husband, you have come to this house everything Kumar will look after. He will not let him come anywhere near you. We sat down in the chairs at dining table. Chitti brought the dishes and placed them on the table. Sunitha introduced Chitti as Kumar's cousin and she looks after the kids. I asked Chitti, who is with the kids? She said Nikita and Loveleen madam are there. I said you should have called her for lunch. Chitti said she just had lunch and went to sit with the kids. I said ok. We completed our lunch and I took them both to the kids room and introduced Joy. She asked is she is the one almost drowned. I said yes and I offered the Team Lead position for the development team. Now we also got the Godrej project and we got the purchase order for the software and hardware and also got advance cheques. Nandini also asked to arrange for software and hardware for their hospital in Hyderabad. I told her I will support her financially and she asked them to be supplied by us. I told her we do that by the next months end. We said byes to her went back to the office.

I asked joy to give copies of her certificates for our record. She said she will get them tomorrow. I said you did not get your biodata? She said she came to meet with Sunitha. Her parents were worried that she did not call them and her phone number was not working. I said after she shifted here she may not have talked to them. So, her mother asked me to visit her when I said I know where she is working. I also gave them the office number. When I visited and it is Sunitha who has offered to ask you for a job. I said it is no problem. She said I did not know without an interview I will get the job offer. I said by seeing you I

understood your capabilities. So, I took you immediately when you asked for job. The share offer part is to stop from you going elsewhere and to let you think you are working for your own company. When you submit your certificates, I will give you letter for the job. She went away to the developers cabin to check with the developers.

The next day she came with the copies of the certificates. Then I could know her full name Jocelyn Fernandes. I thought I heard the name before, where? The courier company's VP's secretary. Her name is Joyce. Then where did I hear?

I put her name in the order I prepared for her and printed, signed, and handed it over to her.

Saturday morning it is the third time we are doing a house warming ceremony. It started with our office premises then the house. Now this new building. My cousins have also come from various places. They wanted to see how this house would be and they are also interested in my party. Loveleen already vacated her house. She shifted the majority of items to the new house, still, she is staying with us to get acclimatizing with us. Maybe in one or two days we will all shift over there vacating our house also. Loveleen's house we decorated for the purpose of renting for movies. With the right amount of light in the right places, it looks amazing. We wanted the visitors to have a look at the house. The evening party we have arranged at the back yard of our office this time. As usual, Krishna is in charge of the party. I gave special attention to the Godrej MD and purchase manager. I wanted them to be impressed by our office and houses. As expected it has had the required outcome. Then there is the MD of Rama and Krishna Hospitals, who went to see the hospital software with Nandini, he said he will be giving the order next month-end. As they did not have budgeting they have postponed for the next financial year. I said we are always ready to serve them whenever they are ready. Give us a week's notice for giving orders for the hardware.

Seeing Loveleen's house the MD asked his house to be decorated by Loveleen's firm. Overall it was fruitful party for us.

Chapter 2

Kumar

February 28, the day we were waiting for the budget. As we expected the new central excise regime is announced by the finance minister. I said we have to start pushing our software which is ready with the new rules compatible. I know as time passes some elements will be updated and we are ready with such changes to be incorporated. I proposed to have an advertising campaign for the software with the compatible to new rules.

The telephone rang and it is Godrej MD. He congratulated me on the software. I said as soon as we receive the final set of rules we will incorporate and deliver the software for testing. We have already delivered the hardware and it is being installed for use. First, we have installed the systems for typists and stenographers, they have started working with the new setup and were happy. Networking is being completed and our people are installing the systems and checking them.

Overall it is a good day for us as we could maintain our reputation.

The next call was from Shakha Pramukh and he wanted to review the situation. I said I will come over and we will review the working of our last reports. I have to tell him to get his people from all over the state to collect such reports.

I got the driver to bring the sweets and distribute them to the staff.

I took the bike and went over to meet Shakha Pramukh. He said he got the results of the initiatives taken through the reports and it is very encouraging. The leadership thought that they should be followed all over the state. I said to follow throughout the state they need to collect the data for the state. You should instruct the Shakhas throughout the state to start collecting the required data. Then based on that data we can decide which items can be processed immediately and which need to be incorporated into the promises. This way we will be in a position to know what to do during the next year before the elections. Here we have to go point by point. From the works carried out you must be having an idea of what should be carried out immediately. He said yes, we have done that. See I don't have to tell you always do this and do that, you can decide what to be done and what needs to be postponed. So, if an area is having a drinking water problem, you should look into that and act on that and don't forget to mention that you got it done and you can do so much for them. Let them think about what you can do in the future. They should not think that all their problems are solved, whoever we vote for doesn't make a difference.

They should think they have done so much for us what else they can do for us if we vote for them, and the ruling party is useless for them. They never do anything for us. This kind of attitude should be inculcated in the voters mind. You have an advantage over the ruling party, you should use it for the good of the people.

He said yes, I got an idea what you are saying. I will call a meeting with the Shakha Pramukhs and we will go through this theory with them and ask for their opinion. I said you do that and came out took the bike and returned to the office. If they do fifty percent of what I said, they should easily win the elections.

There was a little doubt behind in my head making me think I am doing things in the correct way or not. What I am doing wrong. How to know. I should put my day-to-day life in writing. If at any time I am down and out I could recollect the things and find where did I go wrong. But so much of my life passed away. I am nearing my 30th birthday. The best thing would be to put all my past in a kind of book. From now on I could put things in a kind of diary. But if I put them in a book someone can read them. I will create a kind of software for writing and storing the data in an unreadable format. To read I have to enter a certain password. This would be the best possible way to do it. Maybe I will put it in my will and to be handed over to a certain person after my death. Why am I thinking about death recently? Why I am preparing for the children's future? I don't think Sahithi has any idea of financial management. Even after all these years of working how much money does she has? She keeps the money in the bank I think. Would she invest in anything other than my company? I don't think she knows how to manage money. That could be the reason I am trying to see the children are not suffering after my passing away. What they do with the money is their lookout. They should not suffer like me growing up. I started the computer and started preparing software for typing and saving the data in a simple encrypted form so that anyone comes and opens my computer and can't read it. It took me five minutes to do that. I typed some matter which I could recollect from my childhood and saved it and closed and opened the program again. The screen allows me to type without any interruptions. If I press save button the matter gets saved and the screen clears. If I want to read then I had to press the view button and it asks for a password, when I entered the correct password there is a list of chapters. When I select the chapter, I could read the matter. First I am typing the details of childhood so I am putting age as the heading for the chapter. Then as time passes I will see what I can come up with. I continuously typed until it is seven pm and Sunitha came and asked are not coming home? I said I will come after one hour. She asked what are you doing

and came inside? I pressed the save button and the screen cleared. I said nothing much just checking a program. She sat down on the chair and said you seem a little anxious these days. Are you overworking yourself? I said no, I was a little anxious about the budget, but now that is cleared and we got joy to look after the development I am relaxed now and trying new things. What new things she asked? I said I am writing my autobiography. She said can I read it? I will let you read it when it is ready. It needs a password. I will tell you only what is the password. She asked what is the password? I said "I love Sunitha" in small caps that it the password. I think you are the only person I can let it be read. Maybe Loveleen too. She knows about me and you. She got up and said ok when you finish let me know and went away. I got up and went behind her to the outside and lit a fag. She waved bye and went through the gate to the other house. Now we have to cross three gates to reach the house. We have yet to get any rental orders from the movie makers. But in the mean while we have rented them for a big marriage. One bungalow for the bride and one for groom. I think we have recovered one month's rent from that. I know things always pick up slow especially in these matters. I went back to the room and started typing my story. I reached until I completed my SSC exams and returned to Vijayawada. I looked at the time it is after 8:30. I closed the system and went out lit a fag crossed over the gates and reached our house. I snubbed the fag and entered the house. Children are playing in the hall. There was tv blasting off and no one is watching. I sat down on sofa and switched to news. There were discussions going on about the budget. When the subject of the Changes in central excise rules, they said they are going to change the manufacturing industry. I listened intently as they were discussing about how the rules will be implemented. They are required for the purpose of software updating. I called Sahithi's house for Joy. When she lifted the phone, I asked her to go to Godrej and get the details of the excise duty changes from their concerned department for updating the software. She said while coming to the office she will check.

Atul came to me running and caught me calling me daddy. Dhruv also came behind him calling me daddy. I caught both of them with each hand and turned them and put them on the sofa. Now it is the turn of Reena and Leena to come to me. I also caught them and turned them and put them on the sofa. Now I said it is catch me now and run around the sofa with the kids running behind me. I stopped and sat down on the sofa. They all came and caught me. Sahithi came and called for dinner. Chitti said she will look after the kids. I went and sat at the dining table. Sunitha went and called Loveleen. Loveleen came and sat at the table. She seemed a little out of herself. I asked her what happened? She said she got a little headache and nothing much. I said ok, take care and started to

eat my dinner. Completing dinner, I went out and lit a fag, and looked around. It seemed whoever was spying on Loveleen went away. Also, this building would have been a little out of focus for them. Sonu, Monu came over, I rubbed their head and they sat down. I looked them over they have almost become adults. They looked fierce for the outsiders. Nobody dared to enter the gates when they are around. Even servants used to ask the watchman where are the dogs before entering. If they are around he would have to catch hold of them before they entered the house. They smell the fear in them and shout at them. What they don't understand is that they should let them smell and they would go away.

Completing fag, I went to the library and switched on the system. I picked the software and data file from the server. I run the program and clicked the view button. I selected chapter one and started reading. It was about my being an infant. I wrote some things I remembered from then and some things my parents or grandparents told about me. The second chapter is about primary school. Then chapter 3 about high school up to 8th Standard I studied in Vijayawada. Here I remembered when I went to see a movie in a nearby theater alone. When returning from watching the movie I had a kind of déjà vu and when I reached home my father had come from his tour. I remembered the same thing that happened previously when I went to watch a movie, my father returned from a tour. It seems I had the ability to feel about the future then also. The next chapter is about my studies in Vizag and the next chapter is about my studies in the village. These two years I had really a blast with games and sports. The next chapter is about the time I landed in Vijayawada and my family left me there and went away to Bombay.

I started to continue my writing about seeing Sneha on terrace and me going to the grandfather's clinic and how she came over there with fever and so on.

I continued the writing until Sahithi came over to call for sleeping. I saved the writing and closed the system and got up. I said I will have a fag and come and came out lit a fag and went over to the watchman. I checked with him that he had locked the back gate and how things are running and completing my fag snubbed it and returned to the bedroom. I sat on the bed with my back to the head of the bed and adjusted pillows. Sahithi came over after five minutes and sat on the bed beside me with her back to the head. She said I heard you distributed sweets today. I said as we anticipated the FM has announced the changes to the excise rules. She asked if they changed the excise rules, how will they affect our companies? I said we got the Godrej order citing the changes in the rules. If they had not announced the rules change our word would have

been maligned and they might have cancelled our order also. That would have been disaster for our software company. We were planning to sell the software to many companies based on the change of rules. Now I asked advertisements to be placed to sell our software. Which should be ready by the month's end. Now we should be comfortable for the next year. Our kids firm will be also be in good position, we are getting good orders for the hardware. We have yet to start off on renting the bungalows. But hardware sales should save us from the low renting business. If you are not sure about the renting business, why did you get us to shift here. We could be living in that house. I lowered the voice and said I wanted Loveleen's house brought to the Kids firm. If I ask her to put it in kids firm she would think that we want to take her bungalow. Now each kid will have one bungalow for themselves. That is the reason I got her to stay with us. Another thing is that as her father wanted she should be closer to us. He would not have to worry about her being alone. He took a word from me after the death of Guru, that I will look after her. If she stays with us I don't have to worry that someone will corner her or things like that. Now Dhruv will also grow up with our kids. Did you see him calling me daddy when Atul called me daddy. Her father wanted him to grow up without having to worry about he being fatherless. If not today, tomorrow we will get handsome returns on that. Loveleen already left the company to your management. If she wanted to return to work I will look some other work with our company and get her to be busy. Then you don't have be worried about her return and she would take the management in her hand. I don't think she had that in her mind to return to the work at her firm. She is no more interested in that kind of work. I will divert her to something else when the time comes. Sahithi said you think about these things beforehand. I was worried if she comes back how could I cope with that.

I adjusted and lay on the bed facing the ceiling. She switched of the lights and lay beside me put her hand on my chest. I dozed off with the coolness from the air conditioner.

I felt a touch on my hand and opened my eyes. From the dim light, Sunitha can be seen. I asked in a whisper what happened? She whispered back come with me. I looked at Sahithi, she turned to the other side sleeping. I got up and went behind her to her room. I sat on the bed and asked are you comfortable with your room. She said it is ok. I asked why did you call me here? She asked when did you come last to my room? When did I come I asked her back? It is nearly ten days. I said sorry, I was little tense and tired for the last few days. She said I thought you forgot about me. I said how could I forget you, you are my everything. You have been with me through thick and thin. You have given me

support when I am down. I think I am working too hard, I will try to cut down on my work. Come near me. She came and stood before me. I pulled her near and kissed her. There is a bang on the door calling Sunitha, Sunitha, Sahithi's voice. I looked at Sunitha and slipped out of the French windows in the back. They open to a small balcony running the length of the house. I moved to our room and slipped back to the room through the French windows. I always keep them unlocked. I then slipped into the bathroom. I heard the sound of Sahithi entering the room and I flushed and entered the room. I asked why aren't you sleeping? She said I did not find you in the bed and I went searching for you. I said you should have first checked the bathroom. I had diarrhea and had been there for a while. She said its ok come and sleep. I said ok and lay on the bed. She lay beside me, as I was already aroused by Sunitha and Sahithi may think otherwise I pulled her to me and kissed her. She responded and we spent and went to sleep.

The next day completing my daily routine I went and sat in my office. I copied the data file and started writing my story. I heard the knock on the door and said come in. It is Sunitha, she came in and closed the door and I said I am sorry, I did not know she would come like that, I think she stopped the sleeping pills. Sunitha said I should say sorry, I have put you in a problem by calling you. I had to do it as I could not get sleep and I was remembering you. I said lock the door and come. She locked the door and I pulled her to me and kissed her, I have also missed you, but I did not get time with all these works. Over that, I could not get away in the nights. You have seen what happened yesterday. We have to think of something else. This is also not safe as we don't know who will come and knock on the door. I sat on the sofa and sat her on my lap and kissed her and generally felt her and let her go. She went back to her room. I came back to my chair and continued typing. I typed for an hour and made tea and sat back sipping. Completing my tea, I got up and went out to have a fag. Joy had come out, I asked her do you want? She said no, I was going for a bottle of water and seeing you outside I came to you. I asked can I help you? She said I went to the Godrej to collect the information and they said they have not got all the information. Their excise department is still collecting the information and when they have a full picture they will let us know. I said I know that, I told you to go there to mark your attendance that you are ready to make changes. We can expect some more orders by the month-end. Then there is hospital software to be installed in Hyderabad. That I will go myself to install. I am thinking of starting our office there. I need a person to look after the office there. We have to send systems there. I have to check LARDs Associates accounts to see how much liquid cash we have. Our firm we are comfortable with the latest orders

and advances received. Do you want to discuss anything else. She said I am feeling little scared to stay alone there. I said until you have this Godrej project you stay there. Once you are free I will get you a room at our house. She asked what if any one comes there? I said only my brother has keys as he kept his materials there. I will ask him to shift them here. Then there won't be any one to disturb you. If any one comes just give a call to Nishitha. She will come with someone and have a look. She said come on a Sunday to our house my parents want to thank you. I said what is the need for that. She said I am calling you for lunch on a Sunday, you must come. I said ok, I will see, when I am free and let you know.

Completing fag, I went back to my room. I continued typing until lunchtime. Saved the data and went over to Sunitha's room and called her to come for lunch. We went and called Joy and the three of us went to the house for lunch.

After lunch, I started to work on the book. By the evening I came up to the point where Sneha goes with her brother leaving me at my sister's marriage. I felt an emotion run in me and saved and closed the system. I went and sat in the beach. After 45 minutes Joy and Sunitha came and sat with me. Sunitha looked at me and asked what happened. She gets my moods and understand me like no other. She asked did you remember Sneha? I said I told you I was writing my biography, I came to the point where she went away. So, I was feeling the emotions at the time and I came and sat here. Sunitha said come with me and took me to her office room. I sat down on a chair. She removed a bottle of whiskey and poured me a drink. She put a packet of chips on the table. I had a peg and when she was about to pour, I said I don't want more. I came out of the office and lit a fag. I calmed a little and told Sunitha let us go home. By the time we went to the house Nishitha left to her house. She called the office and she did not find her there so she went away. I said I will drop you at home. We went back to the office parking and we three went over to Sahithi's house in Vikhroli. I went and looked at the boxes left over by my brother. There are three long cardboard boxes. I called home and he is not there. I called Kirit and asked if the van is free. He said we don't have any deliveries for today. I told him to send the van to Vikhroli house with some workers. He said he will send it immediately with Krishna and two workers. I said that would be sufficient. They were within fifteen minutes. I told them to put the boxes in the van and take them to my house. They went away and Sunitha and I returned to the house. By the time we reached they have already placed the boxes in my brother's room and went away. Sahithi asked why did you get them here. I said Joy is scared someone will come to the house. Only my brother might come for these materials. Now She

will know if anyone comes there, she knows what to do. You might keep a room for her, I don't know how long she can stay there.

I went to my room to change and Sunitha went to her room. I changed and went over to kid's room. Loveleen and Nikita were looking after the kids. I asked Nikita when are your exams? She said this month end. I said when you finish your exams come and meet me in my office, I will give you a job in the office. Decide what kind of work you want to do. She said ok. I played with the kids for some time and went over to my library. I copied the data file and continued my writing. When Sahithi came and called for dinner I shut down the application, went over to the dining room. I chatted with Loveleen during the dinner and having completed the dinner washed my hand and went over to the library. I am slowly pulling Loveleen into my firm. Telling her about the business and asking for her opinion on the matters and putting her opinions into practice if they are feasible and letting her know the result of her opinion. I am making her feel useful to my company when she wants to start working I want her to choose my company than her own company. The reason for that I felt she is more useful to our company than her own. I don't want the work flow of Sahithi and Nishitha to be disturbed. I think they are doing a good job. With Sunitha looking after the marketing end, they are looking after the works, it seems the firm is running to optimal working conditions. Our software company is quite different we are just starting off. I think we can use someone like Loveleen who has business sense and she knows how to carry herself. I think I have to start to take her with to business meetings, to get her interested in our business. the telephone rang and it is mom, you called for brother he just came over. I said tell him I have shifted his materials to his room in our house. If he wants a working room or something like that I will arrange for that. She said she will tell him. I have to talk to you something. I said tell me, mummy, I am listening. She said it is about Ram, he thought Loveleen is interested in him, but she is not responding to his proposals. I said Loveleen is all business and it is not even one year since her husband died. I have seen her attitude, she like to keep people guessing, it is her business technique. She said then look for a bride for him. I said I have very limited connections here. Don't you have someone from our relations. She said we did not find any one from them. Some who maybe interested are not interested to come to Bombay. I said I will look into that. And jokingly added I will prepare a software to look for brides, and cut the call.

Then it struck me I should prepare software to search for brides and grooms. But how will we know about them from all over India? I think we have to prepare something like we prepared for courier company. How it would be to

collaborate with them. They have offices all over the world. Even if we take into consideration their offices in India, at a conservative estimate it would be around 250. I have to check with Mahira about the number of offices. We can ask the courier company to use their offices or use their staff even. How much work do their staff have in their offices? I rang up the kid's room. Chitti picked up the phone, I asked is Loveleen there? She said yes, and handed her the phone. I asked her can you come over to the library I have an idea and want to discuss. She said she is coming right now, I heard her tell Chitti to look after the kids she will meet me and come back, and the call cut.

I explained to her my idea of starting a marriage bureau, it requires offices all over India. We can't maintain offices all over India. So, I want to contribute with the courier company, whom we have given a software where we can transfer the data to multiple offices. So, I want to propose the same kind of setup for this marriage bureau. Now we have an office here. Someone comes with details of the bride or the groom and asks for the groom or bride as per their requirements. We will feed the data into our software. We will search in our database for their requirements, if we find anyone as per their liking it will be fixed with both the parties. If we can't find anyone we will send their details to other branches. If they have any particular place, that also can be arranged. With this method, we can have profiles of all the brides and grooms with each branch. At the end of the day, we will upload the new profiles to other branches. Loveleen listened to all this attentively. She said I have a suggestion. I said shoot. She said we are sending the new profiles to each and every branch, how it will be we go state wise. We will send the data to each state's capital. The state capital offices will collect the data from their branches in their region and send the data back to each branch and to other regional offices. I said an excellent Idea. Shall we go and meet their MD tomorrow to discuss this. She said I am ready to go and meet the MD.

I sat and prepared a document proposing the features of the application and printed and kept it ready.

Loveleen looked at the document and gave it back to me and went away.

I continued my writing until Sahithi came to call me. I said to her I will have a fag and come I got up adjusting the things on my table. She looked at me went away to the bedroom. I closed the door and locked it from inside slipped out to the balcony through the French door and reached Sunitha's room. I knocked on the glass and she opened the French door. I went inside and she closed the door and locked the front door. I said I told Sahithi I am going for a fag and came this

way. I have finished my business with her went outside through the French door and lit a fag had two there puffs and snubbed the fag and came through the French door to the library. Opened the door and went to the bedroom. Sahithi is sitting on the bed waiting for me. She asked why so late, I said I forgot something and went back to the library. I went into the room lay on the bed.

The next day I got ready completed my breakfast went and sat in the library. I called up courier company MD's PA and asked for meeting him. She asked what is it regarding. I said a business opportunity. She must have called him and asked him and she said he gave a time of 11:30 am. I said I will be there and cut the call. I informed Loveleen about the meeting time and she said she will be ready by 11 am. I put the document in an envelop and put it in my table.

I waited until 10:45 then went over to her room. She is ready and Chitti is feeding Dhruv and Loveleen is supervising her. Seeing me she got up and took her purse and came out of her room. I said if you are ready we will go. She said she is ready. I went to the library picked up the envelope and went over to the office parking. I picked up the car and stopped in front of the house. Loveleen came and sat in the front seat. Chitti brought Dhruv with her and they waved their hands saying tata. We drove over to the courier office. Parked the car, picked up the envelope, and went up to the second floor. I went to VP's secretary and gave her the envelope and told her to give it to VP, so he will have an idea of what we came for. She went into his cabin and handed it over to him. He went after two minutes to the MD's cabin. His secretary came and told us to sit in the conference room. MD's butler came and put two glasses of coco-cola in front of us and went away. I told her they get these coco colas from the USA. She asked how do you know? I was dumbstruck and asked how did I know? In fact, the butler told me. Because their guests are coming from the USA and they get all these from there. They have special coffee for them too. She asked when did you get to speak with the butler. Do you know him personally? He did not act like that, if you had known him he would have at least said how are you, sir? I said I don't know I felt he had told me about these things. There is an office room beside this conference room and the next room is the kitchen. She looked at me and said sometimes you talk funny and sometimes you talk as if you knew everything about some people. With the VP's secretary, you spoke like you know her for some time. Is it your way of treating people, especially ladies? If you order them they feel like you are asking with a please. She did not think twice if she should take the envelope to the VP or not. He also took the envelope and went to see MD. What is in that envelop? I said our business plan

if they think it is to their liking they will see us if they don't like it they will say we can't take it forward. Both the parties will save some time.

Loveleen said sometimes I don't understand you, sometimes I feel I know what is in your mind without you telling me about it. The door opened and VP and MD walked in. MD asked is this your idea of business? I said it is a funny story, my mother was asking to look for a bride for my brother. She said she did not find a suitable girl from my family. I thought how could I search for a girl if I don't know if she is there somewhere in India. I know we can't have a server here and can connect to all over India. Then I thought how can I have the data available to all the branches in India. Then we have the model we have developed for the courier business. So, you have offices, manpower systems connected to all the systems through phone modems. Why can't we use the same model for our new business? So, I brought this idea to you. MD looked at the VP and said we want partnership in this business. You develop the software and we will use our infrastructure, so are you ready to do this in a partnership. Now it is my turn to look at Loveleen. She said we came to you with the exact same idea joint venture. I said now I am putting Loveleen in charge of this joint venture. You both work together in finalizing the deal. I turned towards Loveleen, she said it is ok with me. VP said it is okay with us. You have the software and we look into setting up a company and infrastructure. She took her card and gave it to them each. Mr. Lal look at the card and said three companies' names and her designations in each one. He asked what is your relation to each other? I said she is a family member. He asked how so? Because she lives with us. After the death of her husband in the shooting, her father has given me the duty to look after her. Mr. Lal asked shooting? I said last year her husband was shot dead as he was coming out of the gate. The news was in the newspapers. He looked at Mr. Gopal, VP. He said I remember he was Haryana CM's son-in-law. Indirectly I told them she is the CM's daughter. I said you did not come to our house warming ceremony or party. I asked Mahira to call you, did she not call you? Mr. Gopal said she called us but that evening we had a party for the visiting people from the USA. I said you should have brought them to our party, we could have exchanged some ideas. He said I had not thought about it. Where is this house? I said you had visited our three houses, this is beside Loveleen's house and now we all stay there. Mr. Lal said we are remodeling our office downstairs. We are starting a customer service, we wanted to prepare the customer service cabins. Can you do that? She said we can do it, I will send my person for that. What is the third company? She said it is for computer hardware supply. Mr. Lal said if you complete the cabin work, we see what else we can do.

We shook hands and we came down to the car parking. When we got in the car, she said thanks for putting me in charge. I said when you said the joint venture, I know you wanted to be in-charge. I also know you were reluctant to start again with your firm. This would be your best opportunity to show your talent.

I stopped at the gate of our house. I got down and came to the other side to open the door for Loveleen. She got down and I slammed the door of the car and went behind her. She must have put her high heel shoes on a stone or something and her leg twisted and she was about to fall, I caught her and took her inside. The watchman came running. I told him to get the driver and put it in the parking. He went to call the driver. I put her hand on my shoulder and caught her at the waist and took her inside the house. Seeing us Chitti came running and caught her at the other side and helped her to the kid's room as her room is on the first floor. It was the first time I had been this intimate with her. Her perfume smell is still in my nostrils. I felt an odd thrill having caught her at the waist and having her hand around my shoulder. Earlier I used to think of her as from high society and her from a wealthy family. But now it is different, I felt I have risen to her level both in society and in wealth. I sat in front of her and looked at her leg. There seemed no problem with her. I asked Chitti to get some Iodex and I rubbed it on her ankle and advised to her put her feet up and sit. I said to Chitti to prepare a guest room for her to sleep. Now Atul and Dhruv sleep in a room and Leena and Reena stay in another room. Now we are in the girl's room and Chitti sleeps in their room. There won't be room for her to stay here. Chitti came back saying she prepared one of the rooms near. I took her to the room and lay her on the bed. Chitti helped adjust her legs on the bed. I sat on a chair near her and looked at her. She said I am fine. I said yeh, you will be fine, just take some rest. I forgot all the pending works and sat there thinking about her touch.

After some time, I felt hot in the room, even though the ac is running. I got up and said I will be back and came out of the house. I lit a fag and walked to the office. I threw the fag and snubbed it and entered the office. I went straight to Sunitha's room. I entered the room and locked it from inside. Seeing me locking the door she got up and said you seemed to be in a hurry. I went to her and started kissing her passionately. We had sex on the table and later she told me you seemed different today. You seem to have been missing me. She said come and pulled me and kissed me, and said go I have lots of work. I adjusted my dress and went to my office room. I lay down on the sofa closed my eyes. I felt like I have been drained of my energy. I slept for maybe an hour. Sunitha came and opened the door. She said are you sleeping, I came to call you for lunch. I

got up and said let us go. We went to Joy and together we went for lunch. At the dining table, I explained our interaction with the courier company's MD and VP. How we offered to develop the software and run the company jointly. How after coming back Loveleen's leg sprained and we had to help her to the room. I asked Chitti did Loveleen had lunch? She said I just took her a plate to her room. Dhruv is there with her. I said ok and completed my lunch. After lunch, we all went to see Loveleen. She said she is feeling ok. I sat down on the chair and they enquired about her and went back to the office. I looked at her and asked did you have lunch? She replied Chitti brought me lunch here. I caught hold of Dhruv and sat him on my lap as not to disturb his mother. He calmly sat playing with himself as kids his age play. Are you feeling about your leg getting sprained on your first day out? She said it is nothing I can walk by tomorrow. From her words, it seems she is already fine. I said if you need anything please tell me. I put a phone near her hand. I said I will take Dhruv to Chitti, you take rest. She nodded her head. I was still feeling her touch on my hands and my body. I thought if I sat in front of her, I would not know what I will do. I got up and went to the library. Started preparing a document for the proposed software with the courier company. Completing the document, I put it on the server and called Joy and told her to look at the document, if she has any questions she can ask either of us. I sat back on the chair thought why am I feeling like that about Loveleen. Previously I never felt so strongly about her. I had some feelings for her but I could always play down them easily. Maybe touching her waist had brought my hidden feeling out. Then I remembered her giving me drugs to get her work done. Maybe thinking about those two incidents has put ice water on my feelings. Have I done the correct thing by calling her to stay in the same house? I gave my word to her father, I had to keep her closer to keep her safe. If she is closer I can keep her safe. Is that the reason I want her to work closely with me? What is her relationship with me? Why I am pining for her without any relationship? Is it the correct word, pining? What are my real feeling for her? Do I love her and I could not tell her that because our relationship can sour? How long have I known her? I know her for more than three years. Did I ever feel about her like this? Until now I was looking at her like a rich socialite. Who we should only look at from afar. But when I had brought her inside the house by putting hand around her, did I feel a closeness to her. Am I thinking I have reached her level? How should I further act with her? All these days I have treated her like a friend. A friend is in need of my help. A damsel in distress. She is still a damsel in distress. What has changed now? Just putting my hand around her waist has changed my whole perspective of her. Am I seeing her as a thing I have to achieve? Achieve what? Achieve her closeness? Or is it achieve

her level? What she is expecting from me? Companionship? A little more closeness? Or to bring me to her bed? I don't think she has any intention of bringing me to her bed? Otherwise, she would not have done that drug business with me. At least she would have asked me to try to give her a child. Is that the reason I was keeping her away all this while? I could not decide how I should behave from now on.

Chitti came to the door and asked anna, do you want tea, I am preparing for madam. I said ok get me also. I got up and went to the room she made her temporary room. I sat down on a chair. I keep looking at her thinking how beautiful she looks. She must be accustomed to people looking at her as there is no reaction from her to my staring. I was looking at each body part. I was thinking how is her nose, her cheeks, her hair, and how she wore her hair. Her chin and then her throat. I stopped there as I don't want to go further down as her blouse was exposed. I turned my gaze to my hand and fiddled with my hand. Chitti brought the tea and gave me one and handed her one cup. I sipped the tea looking at everywhere else except her. I felt a little awkward looking at her for the first time. I drank my tea and handed Chitti my cup and went out. I lit a fag and looked around. The watchman got up and saluted me. I looked closely at him and asked are you new here? He said the other watchman is on leave, sir. I said he was here when I returned. He said there is some emergency in his house, so he called for me and went away. I said don't salute me another time. I snubbed the butt of the fag and walked to the office through the gates. When I reached Pauleen said there is a call from Shakha Pramukh. I said I will go to my office and call him. I sat down and called him. He said we are calling for a meeting of all the Shakha Pramukh's from all over the state. I said good, when are you fixing the date. He said that's why I called you. Are your houses for rent are free? I said we have not got any offers from any movie producers. Then we would like to have them for at least one week for the conventions. I said ok, you can have it, even if we get any offers, we will ask them to postpone, any thing for you. He said ok, we will fix the date and let you know.

My thoughts went back to Loveleen. I could not get her out of my mind. Even Sunitha could not clear my mind. Now I could understand how it feels to be love struck. I have not felt like this with Sneha, I loved her and our love is like teenage love. I loved Sahithi and I don't know what kind of love is that. It must be for her showing me sympathy. Is it sympathetic love? I loved Sunitha, it must be lust and not love with her. Now, what is it with Loveleen, lust? Do I feel lust towards her? I don't think so. It does not seem to be platonic love. Am I helping her because I will get something in return? I have not expected anything from

her, and I have taken what was given to me. Over that, I want to share what I have got with others. I have given my friends shares in the company, maybe they invested but I had given them more than their value of the investment. I also gave them an option to withdraw their investment. I have given positions to Mahira and Sunitha. Even though giving Sunitha the post is my own selfishness. I wanted to elevate them by giving them a higher position than they deserve. It is my inexperience that I could not understand what I should give them, especially with Mahira. But my estimate of Sunitha was very accurate as she has risen to the position I gave her. Getting Sahithi to work with Loveleen was our selfishness, I had to do it for her sake. She also has risen to the occasion. Getting Nishitha to work with Sahithi was something else, I have done that to help Kirit. But it did not work out for him, it has worked out for us. She was giving support to Sahithi. Professional wise our plans worked out. But relations have not always worked out. Expect for Sunitha all my relations were in shambles. Sneha was dead and Sahithi has become distant. Loveleen I had kept my distance.

There is a knock on the door and I said yes, Joy entered the room and sat down in front of me. I thought what is my relation with her, why did I save her?

I said yes. She said I want to discuss the application. I said ask me away. We discussed the project for another hour, satisfied she went away. I think I have to think up new projects like this.

If the marketing team can't bring up orders, I have to take up the projects this way. We were successful with Godrej and this project with the courier company should be a go-getter. If this goes through we should have our software running throughout India. Maybe we should use it for advertising or something.

After a week we registered a new company with a joint venture with the courier company. We named the company Pan India Matrimonial Services P Ltd. We both have 50-50 shares in the company with an equal amount of share capital.

My feeling for Loveleen had cooled down after two days. Sunitha must have enjoyed those two days. I was more aggressive with her and she liked that side of me. I had some kind of fire in me that was brought out by Loveleen's touch. We had sat side by side on train and flight, but this was different. I hardly went to see her for those two days. After my fire cooled down I went to see Dhruv. For the company registration, we went to their office and signed papers and they sent the papers to their CA. While returning she asked for the last one week you seem different. You were avoiding looking into my eyes. For two to three days you did not come to see me or Dhruv. What happened with you. I looked at her and turned my eyes towards the road. On SV Road, I stopped at a

restaurant and said we will have tea, come. She got down and we went and ordered tea. I said I don't know how to say this to you. I always considered you a friend. I thought our friendship is a kind of platonic love. But that day when you slipped and I caught you and took you inside the house catching you at your waist. After that something happened to me. I felt like a fire was lit in me. I felt hot in the running ac. So, I went over to my library. I could not sit there, there was some kind of turmoil going on in my mind. I went to the office. I could not sit there. So, I lay on the sofa and slept for an hour. I felt a little better and came for lunch when Sunitha called me. It has taken me more than two days for the fire in me to be brought to control. I did not understand what happened to me. I have come with you to Delhi. We went on the Rajdhani expresses. I did not feel anything that time. When you hugged me and cried then I did not feel like this. Why did it happen this time? I am still reeling from that feeling. I am feeling like you have lit a fire in me and now it is simmering in me. I looked at her and asked tell me what you think of this. She looked at me for a long time. Our conversation was disturbed by the waiter bringing the tea and placing it in front of us. She said thanks to the waiter and he went away. She was about to speak something and stopped. She sipped her tea and I sipped mine. Completing the tea, she asked for the bill. When the waiter brought the bill, she put a note in that and got up. Seeing her paying for the tea I got up. I stopped at our house and she got down and drove over to the office and parked there. I went over to my office room and checked the progress of the software. At lunchtime, Sunitha came over with Joy and we all went to the house. We completed our lunch as we are about to go out, Chitti came and said Loveleen is calling. I told them to go ahead and went to Loveleen's room. She said pack your bag we are going to Delhi. I said is there something urgent. She nodded her head and told me we have a flight at 5 pm. I said I will come in five minutes. I went and put some clothes in a bag and came to her room. She is ready with her bag packed and she said my driver is coming. She looked at her watch and said we have another hour to reach the airport. I took the two bags and put them in the hall. I called Sunitha and told her I am going to Delhi on urgent work. She asked when you will be back. I said two to three days. After five minutes her driver came and she told him to put the bags in the car. We went and sat in the car and he drove us to the airport. We took the boarding pass and went through security and sat at the boarding gate. I looked at her in anticipation she would say something. She was staring straight. I thought if she want to say something, she would say it. I got up and lit a fag and smoked. After completing the fag, I snubbed it and came back and sat down. At 4:30 the gates opened for boarding and we went and sat in our seats. She still did not say anything, I thought it must be something

serious for her to sit like this. I asked will Dhruv stay with Chitti? She replied he got accustomed to her and others. He treats them like his siblings. I think she can manage. When she managed your twins after Sneha's death, she can manage anyone. I don't worry about him anymore. You did a good thing putting him with Atul. He got accustomed to sleeping with him. Now I don't worry about him anymore. See I can leave him in the care of Chitti and can go to Delhi. The flight has started to roll out and I kept silent.

We landed in Delhi and we took the bags and went outside Vishal was waiting for us. We handed our bags and he lead the way to the car. He took us to the hotel we stayed at when we first came to Delhi. She took the keys from the reception and we went to our room. I placed the bags and sat on the sofa. She said she will change and come. She changed and came and said let us go for dinner. I got up and I said I will come in a minute. I went and washed my face and came. We went to the restaurant. We got a table immediately. We went and sat at our table. She ordered drinks for us. I silently sipped my drink. After two pegs, she ordered dinner. I silently had it. After completing the dinner, the waiter brought the bill, I looked at the bill and put my credit card for payment. He took away the bill for processing. When the waiter brought the receipt, I signed and took my copy and credit card. She put some tip for the waiter. We went over to our room. I sat on the sofa and switched on the tv. I switched to the news and started watching it. I did not find anything important and switched off the tv and looked at the newspaper on the table. Loveleen changed and sat beside me. I looked at her and kept on reading the paper. She adjusted her throat. I felt she is signalling she wanted to say something. I folded the paper and put it back on the table. Turned toward her and looked at her as tell me what you want to tell. She kept looking at me for some time and said you are not alone in this. I did not understand what she meant by that and asked what? She said you are not alone in feeling the way you felt. I asked who was with me in this? I did not have a clue what she is referring to.

She kept looking into my eyes, I was waiting for her reply. I thought she was thinking of something to say. She looked at me for perhaps a minute or two. She caught my head and pulled it near to her and kissed me on my mouth. I felt a jolt of lightning run through me. I have must have shaken from her kiss she left my head and asked what happened. It is my turn to pull her and kiss her on the mouth. I kissed her hard and released her. Again, I felt the hotness rising in me. I got up and pulled her up and put my hands on her behind and pulled her close. I kissed her on the cheeks, her mouth, her throat. She hugged me hard and kissed me again. I felt like I was on fire and pushed her to the bed. When I pushed her

on the bed I felt like I found my long-lost lover. I felt like I was waiting for this exact moment my whole life. With urgency, I had removed her nightdress and climbed on her. It was an experience I never had before in my life. It was like two dragons colliding. Tired from the copulation I rolled aside from her lay on the bed face up. She got up and brought the packet of fags and gave me one and lit it. I dragged the smoke. She took the fag from me and took a drag and gave it back. It was the first time for me to see her smoking. I took a drag and gave it to her. She took a drag and exhaled the smoke. She again took a drag and gave the fag back to me. I took a drag and was about to give her, she refused and got up and wore her nightdress, and sat on the bed. I took two more drags and snubbed it in the ashtray. I adjusted myself half sat on the bed. She turned towards me and put her hand on my chest pulling small hairs on my chest, she said when Guru did those things with me I felt scared of sex. That is the reason I had to resort to the things I had done with you, by giving you drugs. But when last week you took me inside the house after I had sprained my ankle, I had felt a kind of hotness in me as you described. I did not know what to do. I felt I could not ask you as you are already married and you also have a girlfriend. I thought I could not burden you with me and my problems and you started to avoid me. I did not understand, what is your problem. You were scared of what you will do with me and break your promise to my father. When I asked you what is your problem, you came out and explained how you felt. You said you were simmering inside, I understood how I myself feel. I myself simmering from that feeling I had when you helped to get to the house. It seems we both lit each other. Our feelings were co-existential and mutually destructive. I wanted to tell you all this at the restaurant, but the waiter came with our tea and my chain of thoughts was broken. Until today I did not understand how I felt about you. Even what I felt, I hid it in me fearing what Guru did to me. But today I could not contain myself and I had to come out in the open with my feelings. I know I could not do this in that house and I had to bring you here. I am still simmering inside but now I am feeling like warmth enveloping my whole being. I feel like my life's goal has been achieved. Come I want to go another round. I want to cool down the simmering heat.

Completing the second round I lay with my face upward and closed my eyes and was in the moment. She said I want another baby a girl perhaps. I said it is all in your hand. But it is better to wait for some more time as Dhruv is still very small. Let him be a little older, then we can think about it. She said you just say, I am willing to wait for any length of time you want. I said let me sleep, we will discuss this tomorrow. We have spent three days like this like couples on their honeymoon. On the fourth day around 7 pm, I felt a knot in my stomach as if

someone is in trouble. I called home and mom lifted the phone, I asked is everything is fine? How is dad? She said he just had just come back from outside. He went to Dadar TT on some work and he returned with fully perspiring and he is vomiting. I said you call an ambulance immediately. I will send my driver to help you. You cut the call and call an ambulance. I cut the call and called Kirit and asked him about Krishna, he said Krishna went home, I gave him half-day, today being Sunday. I said ok and cut the call. I called my house and asked about Ramu. Chitti went and called him. I told him to go to Vakola and collect Krishna and go to my house in Wadala. My mother needed some help and you help her the way she wants it. I will return by first flight. He said ok and cut the call.

I asked Loveleen to book the first flight back home. She called someone and said it will be booked. I could not get sleep and was tossing and turning the whole night. I packed the bags, ordered coffee, and woke up Loveleen. She got up and readied and we went to the airport. After reaching Bombay I called up home and asked for an update. Sahithi said mom had called her and said everything ok as father had a mild heart attack and they had taken him to the hospital at the right moment. I said I am coming home, I am at the airport. I will speak to you after coming home. We reached home and took Loveleen's son and reached Sion hospital where he is put up. He is in ICU and they are going to shift him to a private room today. By the time we reached he was shifted to a room. Mom asked why did you call and asked about dad? I said I felt someone is in danger and when you said he was having some problem I thought you should take him to the hospital. Doctors said he will be okay, only he should cut back on his cigarettes. When the doctors came he said we will put him on observation for 24 hours and probably discharge him tomorrow. I said we will take father to our house. We have already provided room for them. He can stay there until he is ready to go to the office. I said I will be back in the evening and we were back at the office.

I have not checked with them for the last four days about the progress of the software. I sat with Joy and discussed the progress of the software. She said the progress is satisfactory. I said you coordinate with the courier company for the implementation of the software. Loveleen is our contact person for the new company. I did not get to speak to you that day as we had to go on emergency work to Delhi. Now we have registered the company. I and Loveleen are from our side and the courier company MD will be from the other side. We will be 50-50 partners in the new firm. Now I am leaving the implementation to you, I will not be involved in this anymore. Possibly I will go over to oversee the hospital

implementation. I called Mahira and said come to my room. She came over and I asked her is there any enquiry for hardware from the courier company. She said no. I asked her to enquire with them as we are going to launch a new product into the market. They might be needing the hardware. They might also need modems for connecting to telephone lines. She said she will check with them. I asked did Nandini send her requirements for the hospital? She said she had not received any requirements from her. I said when she sends her requirements, be ready to get them to Hyderabad. Don't wait for any advances from them. Immediately get their delivery. I will personally go there and look after the installation. So be ready to supply them the hardware at Hyderabad. Speak with the dealers and tell them to put them ready for delivery. She said ok.

I nodded my head and she went away. I said to Joy she will look at the hardware supply if any. Do you have any more questions? She asked what happened to your work in Delhi. I said we had to cut short the work as my father had a heart attack. We will see later about the work there. It is an ongoing process. It is related to politics not software. She said oh, ok. I said you be in touch with courier company. She said ok and got up went. Seeing her going Sunitha came over. I got up and locked the door and I kissed her. I came back and sat down. She asked how is Delhi. I said it is ok, we could not complete the work as my father had a heart attack, we had to come back. So, how the work is going on? She said it is running. I have missed you so, I came over. We have to make do with what ever time we are getting. Come here. I sat her on my lap and kissed her. She went away to her room.

I called Nandini and asked where is the list of computer requirements? If you don't send it now your order will be delayed and then installation. She said she will send it to Mahira just now. I cut the call.

After half an hour, Nandini came personally to deliver the requirements. I got up and shook her hands and took the list from her. She looked me up down and said you look a little different. I said it is a stressful week as my father had a heart attack. She said you should have put him in our hospital. I said they have called the ambulance and they took him to Sion Hospital as it is closer. Now he is okay, he will be discharged in a day or two. I went through the list and said I will arrange for their delivery. She got up and came towards me. I thought she is coming for a hand shake, I got up and extended my hand toward her. She came near caught my hand came close kissed on my cheek and went away. I was shocked by her behaviour and sat down on the chair. Does Nandini has feelings for me? Otherwise why would she do that. I have that feeling in me about her. It

is better to keep her at her place. Not required to have any relationship with her, except to keep our friendship and business relation.

I got up and went out for a fag. Ramu approached me. I asked everything ok with you. Are you comfortable with your quarters? He said everything ok, I want two days leave. I asked when do you need it. He said tomorrow and day after tomorrow. I said ok, you can have leave. He went away, I completed my fag and went back to the room. Completing my daily routines, I sat down to write my story.

I was typing until lunch time when Sunitha came to ask me to lunch. I saved and got up and said let us go.

Completing lunch, I came back to my office room and continued typing. I heard the knock on the door and I said come in. it's Loveleen, she came inside and sat down on a chair. I looked at her and continued typing. Completing what I have in mind, I stopped and looked at her. There is an open invitation in her eyes. I know it is not safe here. If anyone comes and Sunitha comes to know about us, she will be hurt. I don't want to hurt her feelings for the sake of Loveleen. It seems I am more concerned about Sunitha's feelings than Loveleen's physical relationship. How should we go further in this matter? Shall we get a flat as I used with Sunitha? I don't think it is advisable under these circumstances. Once in a while, we can go to Delhi on one pretext or other. From tomorrow they will start organizing the Shakha Pramukhs meeting. The surroundings will be fully filled with people. I don't know what neighbours will think about this. They may not object to an event by the Sena. It is their headache. We are concerned about recovering our rents. Loveleen asked what are you thinking? I said how we can be together? I can't find an Idea as we went to Delhi. After this Sena Meeting, I have to go over to Hyderabad to install the hospital software. I told her I will personally do the installation there. She said then let us go there. I will say I want to go there for finding some business opportunities, we can stay together like in Delhi. I said then let us try it out. She got up and kissed me on the cheeks and went away. What is with people today, they are all kissing me on the cheeks? Am I looking funny or something? I got up and went to the bathroom looked at myself. I don't normally look at myself, even when brushing my hair, I just do it without noticing about myself. It seems I must have put a little weight, my face seemed puffy. Maybe our kind of living in Delhi must have caused that. I seemed little fairer than normally am. Am I looking like a teddy bear to these ladies? I touched a little water to my face and rubbed it with the towel and came back and sat down. With Loveleen's arrival, my chain of thoughts has broken. Thinking about their actions has disturbed my writing. I

closed the writing and got up and came out. I lit a fag and looked at the gate. It seems there is a different watchman at the gate. That day we had a different watchman at the house, today here. I know there are two watchmen per the bungalow. One works in the day and one works in the night. Sometimes they interchange as per their requirements. But changing the watchman altogether. Who has appointed them and who is changing them. I walked over to the house and entered Loveleen's room. I asked her do you know who has appointed the watchmen for our bungalows? She said she had no idea? I asked her did you notice the watchmen were changing all of a sudden. Tomorrow the Sena people will start arriving. I feel a little apprehension about the changed watchman. I lifted the receiver and called Shakha Pramukh. I told him about my apprehensions and asked him to have their own people for security during their meetings. He said he will send their own people and check who these watchmen are. I cut the call and looked at Loveleen. I sat down on a chair thinking about how these watchmen are involved with our buildings? Who appoints them, who pays them? For the time being Shakha Pramukh will look after the security. We will check once their meetings are completed. Loveleen got up and locked the door and came to me and stood in front of me. I looked up at her thinking about what she had in mind. With Sunitha, I would know what she had in her mind. But with Loveleen it is different. I have to assume things and act accordingly. She has also a high attitude. It is difficult to act with her sometimes. After the three days I spent with her I am getting a hang of the things with her and we had to cut short our tour. At least I called home at the correct time, mom would not know how to act in these situations. Dad always taught me to act, I would think about what he would do in these situations and I would get an idea of what to do.

Loveleen caught my hair and pulled my head back, and kissed me. I felt the heat in her kiss. I don't know why, but with Loveleen, I would always feel the heat with her. It seems she has contained her heat for all these years. She has become cold as ice with the men. Now her ice is melting and her heat is coming out. I kissed her back. She pulled me up and sat me on the bed. I let her do as she thinks fit to do. She pulled her saree up and sat facing me. She continued kissing me and I let her lead. She opened my belt and slid the zip down. I kissed her on her neck and fingered her. I pressed and she made me enter her and she moved rhythmically until she is satisfied. She got up and sat beside me. I lay back trying to recover from her onslaught. It took me five minutes. I got up and adjusted my dress. She opened the door and went out and I sat on the chair and lit a fag. Sitting there I thought how long can I bear her onslaught.

Completing my fag, I snubbed on the ashtray got up and went into the kitchen and made myself a tea and took it to the library and sat down. I started to write the story. Now I have reached when Sneha dies by accident. Completing the writing I felt helpless with the situation. I shutdown the computer and got up and went out. I did not feel like doing anything I went from the back gate into the beach and sat down on the hot sand. Even though the sand was hot, a cool wind blowing from the sea. I lit a fag and kept staring at the sea.

I don't know how long I sat there. When Sunitha and Joy came and sat both side of me I came back from reverie. I looked at them sitting beside me and asked what are you doing here. Joy said when I came to the window, I thought I saw you sitting on the beach, I called Sunitha and showed her, she said actually it is you and we came to see what are you doing. Sunitha said he would only come and sit like this when he remembers Sneha. I nodded my head and kept looking downwards as not to show my filled eyes. In the whole world it is only Sunitha who understand me without talking. She took out a kerchief from her purse and gave me. I rubbed my eyes and gave back the kerchief. She asked what happened? I said I told you I was writing my biography, today I reached the point where Sneha dies. I could not continue the writing and came and sat down. Joy looked at Sunitha what is the story? Sunitha mouthed I will tell you later.

We three of us sat there looking at the sea.

Sunitha

It seems Kumar has not recovered from Sneha's death. When ever he remembers her, he goes into a shell of some kind. He becomes sensitive and it feels like he was about to breakdown. Then he picks him self up and becomes normal and goes on his work. She was his strength and his weakness. He had spent around seven or eight years with her. We went back inside and Joy came behind me to my room and persisted on me telling her their love story as I would call it. I narrated the story as he had told me at the time of the party. I always feel I was part of his story whenever I narrate it. It might be the reason we had come together. When he narrated the story, I became a part of his story, I wanted to hug him looking at the others sitting there I had controlled myself. It must be the moment I connected with him. It has taken me some time as I was working and could not get time to meet him. Then I had to plan to get him to look for a flat for me. Then we were together whenever it was possible for me to meet him. He took time off from his busy schedule and used to meet me. Then he had saved me from the bomb blast and I lost my job in the same

incident. I am alive due to his diligence only and I owe my life to him. Even if everybody leaves his side, I would never abandon him. Telling Joy his story has brought out my inner feelings. I felt like I lived with him those years at college and what happened later. It comes and stops before her death at the hotel. I don't want to repeat that part of the story but had to tell her. I just told her she died in a fire accident. I could not continue what happened after that. I felt like my whole life has come to a standstill. I felt like I could not bear it, I got up poured the whiskey I keep for Kumar and took it in a gulp, and sat down. Joy looked at me with a concerned look and asked what happened. I said I lost my cool telling you the story. I felt like something hit me in the chest. You carry on I am going back to my room. Instead of going to my room, I went to Kumar's room and lay on the sofa there, and closed my eyes.

Kumar

When Sunitha entered my room and lay on the bed, I thought about what happened. I felt a light smell of whiskey from her. Did she drink before coming to my room? what is the need for her to drink? I let her sleep, she must be having some problem, as I never saw her coming to my room to sleep. Maybe she was tired to go to the house. I let her sleep for an hour or so, then made two cups of tea and woke her up. She must have been refreshed by the sleep, she got up and took the cup and said thanks. I asked her did you have drink before coming here? She said I had a peg from your bottle. I asked what is the need for the drink. She replied I had been telling your story to Joy and I became emotional from that's why I took a peg and came here and slept it off. I know you will understand. I said don't mind me, why did you really become emotional from telling her the story? She replied when I was telling Sneha story I was living her experiences, I don't know how that could happen? I have seen everything happening in front of me. When it came to the part where Sneha caught fire, I was thinking about you and the children. How you can live with out me. I was feeling the same way Sneha would have felt when she was fighting for her life. You called me and I opened my eyes and I wanted to tell you something, but I could not speak. I trying to shout you were not listening. I wanted to tell you to look after Atul and Reena. Then everything became blank. Then I felt I could not bear anymore took the bottle I keep for you from the cupboard and took a peg and told joy I am going to my room and then on the way I saw your room and came and lay down here. I said I always thought our feelings and bad memories always surrounding us and sometime some people catch those memories and may live through them. I think that could have happened with you. Some people call it ghosts. There is nothing like ghosts, it is our bad memories twirling in the

nature as a black energy, which when telling the story, you caught. I think you might have caught it at the time I am sitting in the beach. I just completed the part of her death and what I have written just now what around me as an energy. You came and sat beside me and you put your hand on my shoulder, that must be the time you caught the energy and by telling the story you relived the story. I can't find any other reason for your emotional outburst. Joy did not feel the energy because she did not touch me and we did not have such a connection yet. How did you feel when you are reliving the story. She said I felt your love, your frustration when she went away. And the feelings when she returned with your two children. Once side the problem with Kirit and another side Sneha had returned with your children. You did not have time for hugging the children. You can't explain your feelings to Sneha. You can't scold her for going away, your feelings did not come out as words. I know you want to tell me I love you, but you were dumb struck by my return. You were thinking what you will tell Sahithi? How you can explain the love you have for Sneha and you know Sahithi loves you that much and you don't want to disappoint her. I felt everyone of those emotions. It was like I was looking into your mind and heart. You and I were the same person. I have become you. I thought I was living the emotions of Sneha, no, it was your emotions for Sneha I was living. I understand how we could connect, we had a link maybe from the last birth. I said we may have a link from this birth but from a different dimension. She said what are you talking. I said I was reading about this for some time. I am thinking Leena came from another dimension. Otherwise she would not know so much about our family and over that she was Sahithi's daughter. I thought about the circumstances of her disappearance and where she grew up and it does not match our life. So, I concluded that she must have come from another dimension. She asked that means she can't go back? I said I really don't know, she might be pulled back by the same force which brought her here. That is why I was aloof with her thinking she might go back to her dimension and I don't want to have that pain. It was different with Sahithi altogether. She was catching that Sahithi's motherly emotions and becoming distressed. I had to bring her back to her senses, so I told her she is your daughter only from the future. Then when she believed that Leena is her daughter only and she become normal. I hope that reduces the heart ache that Sahithi must be feeling. You must be knowing what motherly love is. How it can affect if your loved child is no longer in front of you. I have seen mother's suffer for sending their kids to school or college away from them. That motherly love, only a mother can have, a father's love is different. They spoil their kids with love. Either too much love

or no love at all. Some even show negative love, I don't call it hate. I don't think there is a word for that in our vocabulary.

She said I have seen those kinds of fathers, very strict, very controlling. Sneha's father must be one of them. Instead of understanding her love for you, they caught her single word that she ate non-veg with you and send her away from you. What is their caste? I said I don't know and never asked her. I assume they must be Vaishyas. I think Sreenu's family is also the same. They are businessmen and they have a lot of charitable institutes in Vijayawada. Like our school and college and choultries and such things. We have many people around our house. But we never had a problem with them. They never objected to us eating non-veg. My grandparents had very good relations with them, they treat us like family members and call us for all the functions. After coming to Bombay, we have left all of them behind. One thing I did not understand is why her grandparents have acted such a way with me. They are not violent people, like some other people from Rayalaseema. They must have been deeply hurt from knowing I had taken her away from their care. They must have told the persons who they had sent only to bring her back anyhow. They must have misunderstood what they meant by that. Otherwise they would not have hit me mercilessly. I don't know whose Idea is that to take her away from me. They fell on their faces when they found she was pregnant. But they went for saving their faces instead of sending her back to me. If they had sent her to me the story would be different, I would not have married Sahithi. Sneha might be alive today.

I looked at the time it is nearing 6 pm. I said let us go home. She looked at her time I have to print today's leads and run to her room. I waited until she came back with the printout. We both went to the house. She put the printout at the designated place for Sunitha and she went away to her room. I sat down on the sofa. Chitti brought children to the hall to play. I told them to come and sit with me. One by one came and sat down on the sofa. I enquired about their studies. If they have any doubts or problems with the studies. They said no problems. Dhruv said he wanted to go to school. I said I will send him to school. The three of them got up to play hide and seek. Dhruv sat with me looking at them playing. He did not understand how to play the game. He would run behind them to catch. I caught him close and looking at them playing. In Delhi, she indirectly confirmed he is my son. Loveleen came and sat other side of Dhruv. I eyed her and loosened my grip on Dhruv. He moved towards her and put his hand on her thigh. I ruffled his head and got up and went to library. Maybe because Sunitha took my negative energy, I felt rejuvenated from the emotions.

This must be sharing problems everyone talks about but doesn't know how it works. I sat down on my chair and continued typing. I was typing how I felt when I first saw Sunitha at the kids third birthday. We did not celebrate their second birthday as Sneha was dead and we were in mourning. The third birthday was a small affair with family and friends. How she came there with Ram's invitation and he was spell bound by her beauty. I thought the two would get connected and instead Sunitha has connected to me. How she was sympathetic towards Sneha's death and want to help us solve the case for us. She has taken initiative and even went to Sneha's village to find the reason. But she came back without success but those events lead to the finding the real reason behind her death and found the culprit. Finally, she has solved the case for us indirectly.

I stopped there and thought she has really been a pal to me. She has stood beside me when Sahithi was uncooperative in bed. Maybe Sahithi drove me to her. Maybe it was my connection with her that pulled me towards her.

I continued to type with my story with Sunitha, Sahithi, and Mahira in between. How I fell for Mahira, then it was Loveleen who has kept me away from Mahira. I have started writing about how I met Loveleen when she hit me with her car and gave me her card and went away. What did I think about her then? I did not see her face then, to fall for her. I had treated her as I would have treated any other lady in her position. I am not the type of person to get angry and shout at people. I try to make them understand the situation. I hardly ever fought with anyone. Except for one bully when I was in 7th standard. He and Ram had a scrap at the milk booth, I don't remember what is the reason. From then on he started to bully me. He would come on my face and shout, call names, and things like that. One day I was coming home with my family, my mother, grandmothers. I was walking a little in front of them and they were walking slowly. We had neared Gandhi Statue. He came and shouted in my face, I calmly hit him over the face and he fell sideways and he never disturbed me again. I thought my mother would scold me, it seems she has not seen my interaction with him. She never brought that matter up. I am a patient person, who does not take these kinds of actions without provocation. This time I remembered another incident, one boy from school used to call me names and I was standing on my grandfather's balcony and he called me a name. I scolded him for calling him names at the house, it would be different if we are at school. He must have gone and told his mother and she was standing outside shouting something and I went calmly in front of her on a work. By the time I returned they dispersed. I could not remember any more incidents from my life where I had to raise my

voice on anyone. Even Sreenu bullying I had to bear for some time, then he stopped. Then I thought patience wins in the end. I kept my patience from that time till now. Even knowing there was some thing wrong in Sneha's death I kept my cool and tried to find out what happened in a methodical way only. I let her grandparents deal with the person responsible for her death. I completed the story of how Sunitha, Loveleen have entered into my life. How I had to get Sahithi a new beginning with Loveleen and how we went to Delhi. How I on a whim went to see her husband Guru and how I had planned to get her out of his grip. How I met Dimple and used her as a pawn to discredit Guru, which in turn resulted in the minister being resigned and subsequent elections being announced. How I using predictive analysis helped them win the elections in just three months. How my life made a turn from that time. I have raised many steps at one time from the events. How I decided to take all my friends with me in my journey and established the software firm and took all of them as partners. Except for Kirit everyone is directly involved in our firm. I even pulled Loveleen now into the firm. Why I want all of them working with me?

Sahithi came over to call me for dinner. I closed the app and went to the dining room for dinner. I looked for Sunitha, not finding her at the dining table, I asked Sahithi where is Sunitha? She replied she said she is having a headache and did not come for dinner. I said I will have look and went to her room. She is still sleeping, I asked her are you alright? She seemed to have taken more drink. I asked why did you drink again? She said I could not bear the swirling thoughts in my head. I did not know you were suffering this much. I said what is the need for you take all this pain for me. Let me help you. I put my hand on her forehead and recited a mantra for releasing the negative energy. It has taken me fifteen minutes to clear her of the negative energy. At last she sat up on the bed and I took her to the dining room. Sahithi asked are you ok now. I said I had given her medicine, she must be ok now. Sahithi said sit down I will serve you.

After lunch, I went out to have a fag. Sunitha came behind me asked did you feel any pain when you removed my negative energy. I said no, it is a kind of therapy I learned. She asked how do you live with so much pain in you? I said I don't have that much pain always, mostly it is dull pain. When I am emotionally disturbed like when I was writing about her I am affected. When Sneha went away I was very much affected. Day to day the pain has increased and it reached such a state I could not have food, I could not work. I was a step away from becoming a mad person. At that time Sahithi came and because of her support I have recovered. She asked did Sahithi was affected by your negative energy? She was not like you, she did not get affected by it, that's why it has taken me so

much time to recover. Next time don't touch me when I am affected, I will find a way to decrease the power of the negative energy.

I went back to the library to continue writing.

I typed until Sahithi came and called for sleeping. I closed the system and went and lay on the bed, immediately I went to sleep being totally tired.

I got up hearing the sounds from outside. I looked out and they already started making arrangements for the Sena meeting. I went and had a look that they are not damaging the property. Came back readied and went to the office. I immersed myself with checking the projects. The matrimonial application is almost ready. Mahira came and said the company is sending the computers to Hyderabad. Completing my work, I went over to the bungalows and looked over. The various Shakha Pramukhs started arriving and they were providing them rooms based on their authority in the organization. Vakola Shakha Pramukh came over and took me and took me to meet some important members. Some of them I recognized as they have already visited our office. I shook hands with them and we sat down where they arranged some mattresses on the floor for sitting. We sat down and some of the members came and sat down. One of them asked is it your idea to arrange the meeting. I said I have given some ideas previously and they seem to be hit with the voters. Then we decided we should get ideas from the people of the state. Now all the Shakha Pramukhs from all over the state can express their problems and solutions. Those solutions may be useful for other regions also. Say for example one area is having a problem with drinking water. We can have a borewell dug and fix a motor to it to get water for surrounding areas. This idea can be followed in many areas. If we do this and present this as our achievement and we will do many such things if we are elected, it will have a great effect on the coming elections. Why should we do this asked one member? I said because we can't lose this election. At any cost we should win these elections. I am not saying we should dig borewells only, we should do these kind of welfare acts where they are needed. We have to show the present government can't do anything for the people. They can't even keep people safe from terrorists. It should be our campaign in this election. They were discussing among themselves what I just spoke. Those from the village areas were asking others who have understood me. Some have come to Vakola Shakha Pramukh to confirm these details. He said he will speak to them again. I said thanks for listening to me and got up and went back to the office. Made myself a cup of tea and came out for a fag. Then in the evening, they had the meeting and he had invited me as a guest. I sat with them and watched the proceedings. Many people came up with

many ideas for their locations. He had put some people to note down the problems and solutions, which they said they will print books and will distribute among them. This went on until dinner time. They broke up for dinner and said they will continue the meeting tomorrow. If anyone wants to give their problems and solutions they can pass them on in writing so that they can be incorporated in their book and printed and distributed before they disperse. If anyone doesn't have solutions to their problems, those also can be given in writing so that collectively they will find solutions for those problems. They all got up and went to have dinner. I went with them for the show I had light food and said bye and went to the house.

The next day the meeting started around 11 am. It went on until 8 pm. After the dinner, Shakha Pramukh called me and there were some important members with him. They were discussing what points to be put in the book. I advised them the common problems and solutions need not be mentioned there. We need solutions where we can't provide immediate relief or where government funding is required. If we print them they can show in their localities that we have noted their problems and we will provide relief immediately if we come to power, else we will try to influence who is in power. We will certainly bring some solution to their problems. Main problems we can put in our manifesto also. We sat and sorted through the problems and decided which need to be put in a book and sent for printing. If anything, new and important points to be mentioned can be put in a supplementary book. Which can be sent to them by post or courier as the case may be. Now showing these welfare measures we can ask for donations from well-to-do families also.

These meetings went on for five days and I had to be present in the meetings and I had to make notes myself for improving my software. As I can understand Marathi well I did not have a problem, the only problem is that I can't speak fluent Marathi and I just managed with my Hindi, English, and broken Marathi.

I had put aside my other official works and been with the meetings daily. The book was published in Marathi for the sake of distribution. Some members took extra copies to show to the people. Overall the meetings were a success.

Mahira informed that the computers were delivered to Hyderabad. I spoke to the persons who have done our networking and send them there to complete networking. They collected their equipment and left for Hyderabad. Now Nandini already left for Hyderabad. I rang her up and said sorry for the delay as I was busy with the meetings. I will come there in a day or two. I am sending the networking people, get the networking done before I reach there. Tell me what

else you need. She said nothing else for now, when you come here I will speak with you. I said ok and cut the call.

Joy informed that the software is ready for distribution. I asked her how they are going to update photos? She said she had not provided for them. I said photos are an integral part of the software. Do we have a scanner in our office? She said yes. I said plan for using the scanners for uploading the photos to the computers and we will plan them to send to the branches. I said we will wait until the photos software is installed before sending the software for testing to the courier company. I enquired about the software for Godrej. She said they are testing the software now and it will be implemented by march end. I said I might be going to Hyderabad for updating the hospital software there and you coordinate with Mahira for testing the software with the courier company. She asked why Mahira, Loveleen will not be available? I said she is showing interest in visiting Hyderabad. We have not planned anything, so I will not know how long she will be in Hyderabad. Then she is thinking about visiting Bangalore and Madras for expanding business. Nothing is fixed yet. Joy said if you are planning for a branch elsewhere why don't you send me there. I said I will think about Hyderabad if you are ok with it. We will start off with a joint venture with Nandini to start a branch. She will need someone to look after the software there. She will coordinate for selling the software also. We will think something. Are you not comfortable staying in Bombay? She said I still have some fear in my heart. I said then come over and stay at our house. She said I will think about it and went away. I called Loveleen I am planning to go to Hyderabad in a day or two. She said I will also come with you. I asked do you want to bring Dhruv with you? She said I would certainly bring him with me. I said I will plan accordingly and cut the call.

I booked for us in the first-class flight and informed her about the travel plans.

I thought about what I told Joy about starting a business in Hyderabad. At the time I had told her as to why we were going to Hyderabad. But now it seems we can start our triple business from a single place, if not three, we can have two businesses. One is software and the second is hardware. If she is interested in the interior decoration business we can start. Both the businesses can run from a single room also. We can also provide matrimonial services also. But to start the interior decoration business we need bigger office premises. Then it will be an altogether different proposition. First, let us think about the software and hardware. Our investment would be almost nil. Just rent a room and have one of two staff and we can run the branch there. We can order from Bombay. Software as per the requirements we can allot staff or I can do the

implementation. It seems to be a workable idea for now. I will speak with Loveleen first then I will think about speaking with the others. Except for Kirit, everyone else is available here to speak with them. Maybe I will have a meeting with them before going to Hyderabad.

I went to Sunitha's room and then to Joy and we went for lunch. At lunchtime, I discussed about the new branches to be planned with Loveleen and Sunitha. They said they said it is a good idea. Loveleen said she wants to see the city before deciding about starting her firm there. She has also to think about a manager there. They have to train someone here and had to send them there. Then that person has to be dependable. Let us see the conditions there then we will decide. I told Joy and Sunitha that we are going to Hyderabad in two days. We are planning to look for places for our businesses. From there we might be going to Bangalore and Madras. We will also check the Pan India Matrimonial working in those cities. I think you can manage our businesses here. They said in unison we can manage. I told Joy if you feel scared at staying there, you tell the driver, he will arrange for your things to be shifted here. What you have only clothes.

I told Sunitha we will discuss the finances after lunch. Bring me the accounts to me. She nodded understandingly.

Completing lunch, I came out of the house lit a fag, and walked to the office. I sat down and called Godrej purchase manager. I said sorry I could not get time to call them as the Sena Meetings were going on. He asked what are the meetings about? I said about the coming elections. We are planning with the state members. I asked about the delivery of the systems. He said the systems were installed. The typists were learning the use of the systems but were very happy with getting the systems. The typing is easier and they can save the documents and making corrections became easier. Others are getting trained in the use of the systems. We are only having some people for testing the software. Your developers said they will clear the data once the software passes the testing and they can start afresh from the 1st of April. I said I will be going to Hyderabad on business after two days, if he needs to contact me give a call to our operator she will inform me and I will call you or she will provide the contact nos. He said he will keep that in mind. I said if you need anything please contact me. He said he will do that. I said we are starting Pan India matrimonial services with the courier company. He asked what is Pan India. I said we are integrating the data with the whole of India. We are going to share the data with each branch. He said give us the details we might have some use for that. I said I will

send someone to show you how the thing will work. He said ok, do that. I cut the call.

I called Mahira and said Godrej's purchase manager wants to see how our matrimonial software works, maybe they are thinking the technology might be useful for them.

I have to clear up my desk by the time we will go to Hyderabad. I better get a laptop. I called Mahira and said get me a laptop immediately. I want to load our software to take to Hyderabad.

I called Joy and asked did you have a copy of the hospital data. She replied yes, we have a copy for the testing purposes. I said ok, I have ordered for a laptop, please load the data and software and other software also for demo purposes. I will take them to Hyderabad.

Sunitha came over catching accounts books. I called Pauleen told her not to pass on any calls. Sunitha came in and locked the door. I said I will be away for a week, come on let us complete our weekly quota. Completing our work and Sunitha went away. I got up and went out to have a fag.

I came back copied my own software in floppies to transfer to the laptop. After sometime Joy brought the laptop to me and said she had copied all the required software in the laptop. I said thanks and took the laptop and copied my own software into the laptop in a separate folder.

I opened my book software and started typing. Once I got up and made a cup of tea and continued until Sunitha and Joy came to my room. I went with them and Sunitha gave the day's report to Sahithi and went to her room. I told Sunitha to arrange a room for Joy for the time being. After I return from Hyderabad I will see what we should do about her stay. I told Joy you get your clothes and come stay from tomorrow.

Chitti brought a cup of tea and gave me. I took the cup and went over to the library. I put down the laptop and continued typing. I continued typing until Sahithi asked me to come for dinner. I went over to the dining room and sat down on a chair. Sahithi, Sunitha and Loveleen had come to the dining room. I told them we are going to Hyderabad. We want to check for expanding our business there. Maybe we will also visit Bangalore and Madras. Check the business opportunities. Sahithi asked can we take up new businesses now? We are in the planning phase now. Until we look at things and discuss we can't finalize anything. We will have a meeting tomorrow. We will discuss these

things. After coming back, we will have a board meeting and finalize the matter. Sahithi looked at me as we will speak later. I completed my dinner and went out to have a fag. Sunitha came behind me and we made a round of the ground silently. Came back and went to the library. I rang up Nandini and told her about our booking flight tickets and asked her to book a suite or a double room at a nearby hotel. I cut the call opened the laptop and started typing. I looked at Sunitha and she was looking at me. I lifted my eyebrows and continued to type. She shook her head. It seems she is concerned about my going. I said I will come back in a week. She just nodded her head. It seems she is feeling I am slipping from her fingers. I said don't worry about anything. Everything will work out to our advantage. I stopped typing and sat back on the chair and looked at her. It seems my posture has had a calming effect on her. I kept looking at her and she seemed relaxed. She said goodnight and went to her room. I waited five minutes and locked the door from inside and slipped from the French doors into the corridor and went to Sunitha's room and knocked on her French door. She unlocked the French doors and I slipped inside. I said why are you worried. This is the first time I am seeing you like this. What happened? Are you concerned about something? She shook her head. I said come and kissed her and I sat with her on the bed and put my hand on her shoulder and pulled her closer. We sat there like this for some time and I removed my hand and said you take rest, we will speak tomorrow and came back to my room. For effect, I flushed the toilet and came and unlocked and opened the door. Sahithi is standing outside the door, I asked her what? She said to come for sleeping. I said I am coming and closed the laptop, came out of the room and locked the door and went with her to the bedroom. I want her to think I locked the door because of the laptop.

I went and lay on the bed facing the ceiling. Sahithi came after five minutes and lay beside me. She put her hand on my chest and asked have you decided to shift to Hyderabad? I said no, I am planning offices all over India. We will put each of our people there as in charge. She asked like who? I said Mahira has some relatives in Hyderabad, if she is willing I will send her to Hyderabad. Sunitha has roots in Madras, she knows the local language also. So, I can send her to Madras, things like that. She said you see, I have my parents here, I don't know anyone in Hyderabad and I don't want to go there. I said I know you don't want to go away from this house. Don't worry, Loveleen won't let you go away from here. She needs you here. Once Loveleen planned for me to work with them in Delhi and said you were needed here, that is before elections. I am just giving examples, we have not decided anything yet. Our idea is to expand and increase our profitability. We can only increase profits by increasing our sales, for that we need to expand. She said ok, ok, I know all that, only I don't want to

shift anywhere else from here. I said ok and closed my eyes, pretending to be asleep.

The morning I got up and readied, had breakfast and went to the office. I asked Pauleen to prepare the agenda for the meeting and give each a copy. I told Sahithi to come to the meeting before going to their offices. I called all the staff to the meeting. I went to the conference room and waited there with laptop. One by one started coming in. Pauleen is handing them the agenda for the meeting. I kept typing on the laptop. When all the members were present I addressed the meeting. I said now we are entering the expansion mode. We need to expand to survive in the market. At present the software market is just expanding. We are in such a phase we just started but we got some good software products like our hospital software and our manufacturing company software, etc. Our matrimonial software, we will be using for internal purpose with the courier company. We can plan to have it used in the upcoming branches too, but we have to do it with Pan India Matrimonial Services only for obvious reason. We need to share the data and we have to keep sharing data with other branches. The hospital software can be sold any where in India, but we need to find hospitals and we need to sell them. Same with factory software. These are already available with us, so we can directly approach them and show the demo and sell the software. Next on our agenda is to get orders for custom made software. We need to approach potential clients and sell them software. We have to make them understand the benefits of using the software. We should push for both software and hardware sales at these companies. Next point is services. When the mandatory one-year free service period over, we should approach them for maintenance of the software. We should not let them approach others for maintenance. This is very important, if others come in our business space we will not only lose the customers we will lose the software as well. They will try to reverse engineer our software and try to encroach into our space. We have to keep our competition out of our client base. I am saying this because some of you may think what is in it for us. I want you to grow with us. I am not going to disappoint any one of you. I have been keeping some shares for you aside. Which you get when your complete five years of service with us. This is aside from the salaries we are paying you. So, remember this company is your as much as ours. We are all in partners in this venture. Now any one is interested in shifting their base to other cities of states you can now express interest. No one said anything. I said so, every one of you is interested to stay in Bombay only. Then we need to recruit others and train them and put as in-charges at our branches.

Hearing the word in-charges they started coming forward. Mahira said she can go to Pune. Rajesh said he can't go anywhere else as his family is here. Nishitha said she can think of Ahmedabad. Sunitha said she can go and train in Madras for a short period. Then Mahira said she can also go and train in Hyderabad.

The meeting concluded with all agreeing we should expand into new territories. How to do it we will discuss from time to time.

I rang up and informed Kirit of the details of meeting.

I sat in the conference room continued my writing. I am writing up to lunch time. When Sunitha and Joy came, we went to the house for lunch. After lunch, I came out and lit a fag and we all came back to the office by walk. Sunitha and Joy were discussing about going to branches. Sunitha is saying that if Kumar comes and visits, I am ready to go to any branch. It seems she is giving me a hint.

I continued writing, by this time I came to the part where Suresh comes and informs us, how likely Sneha had died and we all got closure in the matter. Over that her grandfather had sent us five lakhs in cash as her part of the inheritance. That might have closed our relationship with them, but also the fact that they have regretted what they have done and also have forgiven us.

I thought if I ever visit Vijayawada I should take the kids and show them to Sneha's parents. Maybe I should take them to visit Durga Temple. Or invite them to Bombay to see our raise to fame. I should have sent a message through Suresh when he came to give the message from her grandparents. I should at least have called them for their birthday. I can understand how they must have felt when she died. But I have suffered more than them during this period. They made me suffer three times. First after completion of junior college, second time at my sister's marriage. The third time is not their fault, but they have a hand in that too, by sending the money through a killer. He had let her die for that money.

They think they are the only one suffering from her death, when will they understand my suffering? I don't think these parents will ever understand their kids love and discretions. They should be like our parents, had never objected to our love or indiscretions and they have always supported us. Most of the Indian parents are not like them. I think there are very few parents like us. Some parents give too much freedom, that is also there. It should be in moderate.

Joy came and said I want to update the softwares. We have made modifications in the matrimonial software and manufacturing companies' software. I said give me the source code, I will go through that once I get some time. I want to find bugs in the software. She said she will put it on the server, I can get it from there. I said ok. I told her to sit down. After she sat down, I asked her how you are finding work here? It's ok, better than in the USA. There I was always in a tense mood, I don't know what will happen in the next minute. Sometimes I don't have money for petrol. I used to buy prepaid cards and used to keep them. Sometimes he used to steal them too. I have seen hell there. Compared to that here I feel I am in heaven. Sometimes I feel lonely, then I think it is better to be lonely than to be in the company of my husband. I wanted to apply for a divorce, but I don't know how I can do that from here. He might come over here if I file for divorce he might get my address and I don't know what he will do. Here I feel like I am working in my own company. What money can't buy I get here, that is support from you all. I asked have you got your daily needs? She said yes. Did you get your own room? She said yes. Until I am back you take care. She went away.

I continued my writing and I felt an urge that I should complete the story as soon as possible.

When Sunitha and Joy came to go home, I said let us go and sit on the beach for some time. We went and sat on the sand looking at the sea. Sunitha sat further away fearing negative power. I told her to come near and caught hold of her hand and said there is no negative power in me. I wanted to sit in the sand looking at the sea with you. When I said that Joy also came close to me. We sat there looking at the sea until it was dark and then we went to our house.

We completed our dinner and went to our rooms. I lay on the bed and thought about what I am going to do tomorrow. Our father is fine and came back home. His danger has been averted. We will go to Hyderabad and install the software and look at some business opportunities there. Shall we go to Bangalore and Madras too? We don't know anyone in Bangalore. I think we can at least visit Madras. We will see about Bangalore later.

Thinking about these business matters I slipped in to sleep. When Sahithi came and asked are you sleeping, I awoke. I said you asking sleeping fellow are you sleeping. She said normally you would sit in the library, are you feeling well? I said I am ok, I left the laptop in the office, that is why I came here and lay down. I will have a fag and come. I got up and went out.

The next day, I got up and readied and went to the office. Collected my laptop and came back to the house. Went to my room and packed for the trip and went and checked with the Loveleen. She is packing her and Dhruv's clothes. I told her to speed up the packing and went to my room took the bag and put it in the car and returned to Loveleen's room. I called the driver and told him to collect Loveleen's bags and put them in the car.

We three of us sat down in the car and the driver drove us to the airport and dropped us at the airport and went away. We put our luggage in a trolley went in and handed our tickets and got a boarding pass and took our handbags and went through security and waited at the gates for boarding. I took Dhruv into my hands and rocked and he fell asleep. I put him on my shoulder and rocked him. Then the boarding is called we went and sat in our seats. As It is the first class we had ample room to sit and put Dhruv to sleep. In an hour's time, we were in Hyderabad. Nandini came to the airport in her car and took us to the hotel. She said this hotel is not nearest to the hospital, but it is the best and nearest to the hospital. Don't worry about transport, I will pick you up daily from the hotel and take you to the hospital. I said thanks, we went inside the hotel and registered ourselves. By the time Nandini parked the car and came over to the reception. We all went to our room and put aside our luggage and tipped the porter and he went away. The room is as we asked two bedrooms and a hall and everything a room normally has. Nandini asked is this room ok? I said it will do and looked at Loveleen. She nodded her head. Nandini sat down on the sofa. I asked her do you want something like a cool drink. She said no thanks. I removed the laptop, put it on the table. Nandini asked shall we go to the hospital and have a look. I said to Loveleen take some rest, I will have a look at the hospital and will be back. Loveleen said ok, come back as early as possible. I said see you then.

I picked up the laptop and went with her to the parking. We got in the car and she took me to the hospital. I went there last when the foundation stone was laid. Now the area has totally changed. She first took me to her father. He was in a meeting with some people. He said come and introduced them. They were discussing starting an electricity generating unit. The other party has got approval for starting an electricity generating unit. They were asking Mr. Subba Rao about building it for them. Mr. Subba Rao said you have come at the correct time and introduced me as Kumar, and we develop software and had come from Bombay to install the software, and we have supplied the computers. Another team head is Mr. Reddy and they have come for building the plant. I asked how are you planning the finances. He said we got a loan from a USA

company. We took leave and went checking the networking and placing of the switches. I checked the networking by connecting the laptop at some places and checked and found it to be satisfactory. I went and checked where the server is placed. I said I will be doing the server installation. And the other systems will be installed by the company person, who will be arriving the next day. I checked the placement of the systems and noted what part of the software is to be installed where. Completing inspection, we returned to Nandini's cabin and sat down. She ordered tea for us. I asked her, how are you? She replied I am fine, why did you get Loveleen with you? I said we are looking into expanding here. I was planning for having a small sales office here. For selling software and hardware. She said if you want a single office room, I might find a room for you here on this premises. I said I don't know if it is feasible. Clients might not find it easy to come here. She said we will give you a room and phone connection and what else do you need. I said I am thinking of having a room, where we can set up the office and the developer can stay over there in the room, like live there. something like that. She said if you are having to send your person, they would be by choice only. But if you have a salesman from here that it is not necessary for you to provide them accommodation. I said that is ok. What we are going to look at, is if it is feasible to have an interior decorating firm here, that is Loveleen's domain. I don't have any idea about it. I feel the Hyderabad computer industry is going to be changed in the near future. I would like to meet Mr. Naidu. Nandini said we might know someone, who can get you a meeting. Rohan had done surgery for someone in their family. I think I can get you a meeting.

Tea was brought to us and having tea we came back to the hospital parking. Nandini asked shall we go somewhere? I asked where shall we go?

Nandini said I can't call Loveleen, she has Dhruv to look after, let us go to Rohan House, it is close by. I will go and get the keys, you sit here for a minute. She went and came after 2 minutes showing triumphantly the keys in her hand. She said let us go, we came out of the hospital, she said let us go by walk it is just 2 minutes distance. We walked to the new apartment block. We went by lift to the top floor. She opened the lock and we entered the apartment. Seeing the apartment, I said wow, what a nice apartment. I think we should have this kind of apartment. She said if you want one, I will book you one. I asked is there something on the lower floors. She said people now prefer higher floors. If you want the lowest we have 1st floor. I asked can we see it? She said I think there is some work going on, let go and see. She took the keys and we came out and she closed the door, we came by the lift to the first floor. We looked into the flat,

the flooring is being put. We had a look from the outside and I thought we should have a look at it. I asked when can we have a proper look, I think Loveleen would want to have a look at the flat. I am sure if she sees the flat, she will consider having an office here. She said I will check and let you know, let us go back to the flat. We got in the lift and rode up to the flat. She opened the door and she told me to sit on the sofa and went inside. She came back with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. She put them on the table and went inside the kitchen and came out with some snacks. She poured a peg each and we started to sip and munch. She is talking about something non-stop. I am just absentmindedly listening to her and saying aha, or something like that. I keep looking at her face, so she would think that I am listening to her. If she asked me something I could not reply to it. But she was oblivious to my state of mind. The door bell rang, it is Rohan, who returned from Hospital. He came in and said sorry, I could not meet you at the hospital, I was busy with a surgery. I said no problem, I know how it is with work. So, how is the hospital running. He said you should ask her, she is the one running the hospital. I said if I ask her that she would say everything else except about the hospital. He said we have not opened the hospital fully. We only started emergency ward. And OT is operational. If you start the software we can start making the other departments operational. I said sorry for the delay, at the last minute there was Maharashtra Sena meetings and it was in our bungalows only, and I was asked to be present to understand their problems. He asked how it went? I said this election they would certainly win the elections. I am not sure about next. I have told Nandini about meeting Mr. Naidu, I have some advice for them. But first I need some more information for my software, which predicts results based on the data. He said I will see what I can do. We went on to discuss the Andhra politics as I wanted to have a sense of the politics there, I had listened to them attentively. He seemed to have a good grasp of the politics there and Nandini too participated in our discussions. He said let us go for dinner and then I will drop you at the hotel. I rang up our hotel and informed Loveleen to order room service.

We went to a nearby restaurant and had our dinner and they dropped me at my hotel and went away. I went to my room. I asked Loveleen did you had dinner? She said yes. I asked what about Dhruv. She said he is sleeping. I went and sat on the sofa. She asked what happened? I said Nandini took me to Rohan's flat. It is very nice and I asked to see the first floor flat. She said she will enquire about it. I thought it would be very good for our office space. It is close to the hospital. Nandini said if we want, she will give us an office room with a phone in the hospital. Loveleen said I want to have a look at the flat. I said some flooring

work is going on, so she said she will enquire when it be available for a visit. For the time being, we can use the room at the hospital. I said I will change and come.

I went and had a bath and changed and came and sat down on the sofa watching tv. Loveleen got up from where she is sitting and came and sat beside me putting her hand behind me holding me. We sat there watching tv. She turned her head towards me. I looked at her. She asked what is your story with Nandini? I said my story? She is just a good friend. She said I know that you seem to love her but you are also trying to keep her away. Am I correct? I thought for a second and said I don't know if I love her, but I treat her like a good friend. That is why when she asked I am ready to supply software and hardware without getting an advance. She said I am not talking about business, you seem to have a real connection with her, but you seem to keep her away purposefully. I said you may be correct, when I have been at her house, we both were going to my room, I said is this your room? She said it is, how did you know? And she opened the door to show her room. When I entered her room, I had a weird feeling like I had spent time on that bed with her and I felt aroused by that. I ran away to my room. She asked why did you run away like that? I told her about my weird feeling. Then she asked me to come to her room and I said I don't want to have such a relationship with her as I felt she would break my heart, and I kept her at arm's length from that day. Loveleen said you seemed to have so many lady friends and not many man friends, why. I have friends Kirit, Sreenu, Pradeep. I have very close friends only. I trust very few people like Krishna. She said yeh, you might be correct, let us go to bed. You got us two rooms to make Nandini think we are not together, correct? I asked is it? I thought you would want a second room because you were bringing Dhruv with you. I got up and we went to our room.

I heard a cry, I got up and went to the other room, Dhruv is awake and is crying, I thought he must want milk. I looked in the fridge, there is a bottle of milk. I took the milk bottle and put it in some hot water. I came and picked Dhruv and went and checked the bottle, it seems hot enough and took the bottle and lay Dhruv on the bed and put the bottle in his mouth and lay beside him putting my hand on him. I don't know when I slipped into sleep, by the time I got up it is already 6 am. I went and looked in the other room, Loveleen is still sleeping. I went to the bathroom, brushed and came out and ordered coffee and looked out the door, as expected I found the newspaper outside the door. I picked it up and sat on the sofa and started to read it.

When the doorbell rang, I went and opened the door, it was a waiter with the coffee. I let him in and he put the coffee on the table took my signature and went away. She must have awakened by the sound of the doorbell, she called from inside the room, who is it? I said coffee, she shouted pour me one. I poured two cups of coffee and took her one and gave her. I came back and read the paper while sipping coffee. I lit a fag and continued the reading. I completed the reading and went and had a bath and dressed and sat on the sofa.

Loveleen came from the bedroom and sat beside me. I kissed her on the cheeks and said good morning. What are you gonna do today? She replied I wanted to see the office space you are mentioning. I said ok then get ready.

By the time Nandini came, Loveleen and Dhruv were ready, and we went with Nandini to the hospital. She left me at the hospital and took Loveleen to show some properties. I went and started preparing the server. It has taken two hours for the server to be up and running. While the server is installing, I went and checked with the system's installation by the company serviceman. I explained to him what software I want to be installed and came back to the server room.

I have completed the server installation and then the application installation. After completing installing programs I copied the compiled programs into the server. Copied the data files and cleaned the unnecessary data. The system is ready for testing. I waited for Nandini to return. When they returned I asked what is the outcome of their visits. She said we had visited some new buildings. I think with this trend we can set up our offices here. I am sure we will get lots of Interior decoration orders. She also showed me the land near her house, I think we can buy it for building later. It is a very fast developing area. There is another flat in the building we were interested in other than the ground floor for our office. It is also nice, we should buy it now. I said we will speak with the builder about them.

I looked at Nandini and said Nandini I have completed the server shall we go and check if the systems were ready. She said to Loveleen are you comfortable here? She said yes. She told me let us go. We went and checked the systems that have been installed and checked the software running. She said to them to try out the application and we will clean once the testing is completed. We came back to the server room. Dhruv is sleeping. She put him on a sofa and sat with him. Nandini asked me can you leave her at Rohan's flat? I said that is a good idea, she will be comfortable there. She handed me the keys, I took the keys and put them in the pocket and lifted Dhruv and said come to Loveleen. We walked to the flat and went up in the lift and I opened the door and let her

in. I put him on the sofa and said to Loveleen I will come later and came back to the hospital. We went and updated the systems which are ready and giving them for testing to the users. It took us up to 6:30 pm to complete the updating and allotment of systems to the users. We came back to Nandini's cabin and sat down. She ordered tea and when it came we drank it and decided to go to Rohan's flat. I rang up the flat and informed Loveleen that we are coming there.

While walking Nandini asked what is your relationship with Loveleen? I said I would say I am her bodyguard. Nandini said I thought you would say she is your good friend. I asked what is the fun in it if I say what you are expecting? She asked then what is your story with her? I said if I had to say it short, she hit my scooter with her car and called me to her office. I went and met her. She offered a job to Sahithi later. We went to Delhi for finding a branch office there and instead she told me her story. To help her out I had done a sting operation on her husband and it helped her father to win elections. Then I got all this wealth through her. And I started the software business with all these people as partners. Rest you know. She said when we are free I will let you tell the full story. We entered the lift and she said you did not reply to my question what is your relation to Loveleen? I said like you and others, I think I have a life connection with her too. She asked like me you have rejected her too? I could not answer her question immediately. I don't want to lie to her. I thought for a minute and said that kind of situation has not come between us, then our floor has come and the lift doors opened and we went to the door and rang the bell. I thought I am saved by the lift. Loveleen came and opened the door. Dhruv came behind her. I caught Dhruv and we went and sat on the sofa. Nandini looked at me and a smile spread on her face. I asked what happened. She shook her head and said I want to hear your story? She got up and went inside and brought last night's bottle. Only half of the bottle is empty. She put it on the table and went and brought some snacks. She sat down and poured the drink and said you tell me your story from the beginning, we have a whole night in front of us. I said I don't know if Loveleen wants to hear it. Loveleen said I had heard it before but I don't mind listening to it once more. Nandini said wait a sec, I will check if Rohan is coming. She rang up the hospital and they said he had already left the hospital. She said he will be here any minute and the doorbell rang. She said it must be him and went and opened the door. He handed her a bag and said I brought something to eat. She opened the bag and there is chicken 65 and other items which are for munching with the drinks. She said how do you know we want this. He said I have a sixth sense. Get me a glass. She said your glass is here. He sat down and poured himself a peg. Nandini said he is going to tell his story. Start from the beginning. I started with I was born in Vijayawada then

studied up to 8th in Vijayawada and then studied 9th in Vizag. How I have enjoyed the school there. And then we had to shift to the village for my 10th. How I studied and played with friends. How we spent the time before our exams studying on the terrace of a friend for three months. How I had developed a headache and I could not get the school first as anticipated. Then our family went over to Vijayawada and they left me there and went to Bombay. Then I joined in college there and my time in college with Sneha. Then I went over to Bombay and returned for 2nd year of college. Then went over to Bombay, while I was in Bombay I heard she was sent away and came back and joined in Hyderabad for my degree. Nandini said you studied for your degree in Hyderabad? I said yes, I waited until she turned 18 and with the help of my friends brought her to Hyderabad and married her. After completing my degree, we went over to Bombay and got a job with Kirit. She asked so, what happened? I told them all this story in detail. We completed the bottle and she brought another bottle from inside. I skipped the details of Loveleen's drugging me and instead said while she was in Delhi, her father announced her pregnancy on national television. Then Rohan asked are you Haryana CM's daughter? She nodded her head. How they have given us the bungalows and how I started the software company. Seeing the time, he said I will get some dinner for us. He called the hospital and ordered dinner to be brought to his flat. I continued with my story of how we got the hospital order and under what circumstances I met Nandini and how we started to work together. Then the doorbell rang and an attendant from the hospital gave the food and left. He put the items on the table and Nandini went and brought plates. We served ourselves and I continued my story after dinner. By this time Dhruv went to sleep and Loveleen put him in the guest bedroom. By the time I came to the present time, it is after 12 midnight. So, they started a questions and answers session. I patiently answered their questions. When the time came for sleeping arrangements, Nandini said she will sleep with Loveleen. Rohan said to me to sleep in his room and he would sleep on the sofa. I said I am more habituated to sleeping on the sofa, I would like to sleep on the sofa. Finally, I slept on the sofa and he slept in his room.

I got up and brushed with just paste and finger and went to the kitchen, found milk and a Nescafe bottle. I mixed a cup of coffee and went to the balcony lit a fag and had my coffee.

I opened my laptop and checked how much I have written. It is easy to tell a story in short than writing it. I continued my writing fresh from my storytelling in the night. I did not tell them my full story with Sunitha only about my

interactions with her especially the trip to the air India building. Then my recent interactions with Loveleen were also not discussed. When she smiled when we entered the flat, I thought she would ask about Dhruv's father. But I have woven the story in such a way I told them Guru might be his father. When this story, if the book is printed in the future and if they read it they will understand the real story until then I am keeping this in my heart. I waited for Loveleen to get up so we can go back to the hotel to change. At last not finding her waking up, I knocked on the door of the guest room. Loveleen said come in, I opened the door and asked did you wake up? She said just now. I said come then, we need to go to the hotel to change. Nandini said wait I will come and drop you. I said you need to go to the hospital, we will catch an auto, it will be easier. I caught Dhruv and we came down the lift and came out of the building. An auto is waiting outside and I fixed a price with him to drop at the hotel. We went to the room, then I went to the bathroom, properly brushed this time and had a bath and came out. By the time Loveleen ordered breakfast. I asked her what are you going to do today. She said I will stay in the room with Dhruv, maybe read a book or watch tv. The phone rang and it is Nandini, she said I am coming to pick you up, don't go to the hospital on your own. I said ok, baba, I won't go on my own. We had breakfast and drank tea and waited for Nandini to arrive.

She called from the reception to come down. I picked up my laptop went down to the lobby. She caught my hand guided me to the car. I thought about what she is doing after knowing my story. Why is she behaving like this? We went to the hospital and went through all the departments and reached cardiology. She said I will show you Rohan's room, he is free now, as his surgery is cancelled. We went and Rohan said the electrician is looking for you, Reception called for you. She said you sit here, I will come back and went away. I looked at her going away and asked Rohan, why didn't you get her married? What is her age 26?

He said in 1987 when her parents have gone for a marriage in Guntur and she had stayed back at the house for exams. She was supposed to call her friends to come and stay with her. But due to some problem, her friends did not come and she was alone at the house. Around midnight a burglar entered the house, probably she forgot to lock some door. It was pretty isolated then. He collected some items and entered her room. Seeing him she shouted at him. Then he got scared and left the items he collected there and ran away. She told us that her guardian angel came and seeing him he ran away. He kept her company through the night and when they got up in the morning she dropped him at his sister's house. That is what she told us. After a few days, the burglar was caught at some other house in some other area. When they questioned him, he said he

had seen a ghost appearing from thin air and got scared and ran away. At that time, she has convinced herself that her guardian angel, her hero, her saviour, her prince charming will come and will sweep off her feet and take her to his kingdom. Whenever someone brings her matches, she would reject them saying he is not her prince charming. Nowadays no one brings her matches any more, saying she has gone mad after the incident. She did not let anyone come close to her. She did not have a boyfriend even in the USA. She did not let anyone approach her, let alone befriend her. I was surprised when she started talking about you. She would say Kumar is like this and Kumar is like that. He treats me like a good friend. He gave me a room equal to his directors. Things like that. That's why I came to see who is this Kumar when you came for the foundation laying ceremony. But when I came to know you were twice married, I was disappointed. After the ceremony, she said to me her guardian angel has come for me. At that time, I didn't realize she was referring to you. I think that's why she asked you to tell your story. I still can't think what is in her mind. I think you alone can convince her to marry. I said I will talk with you frankly, when I saw her bedroom, I felt I was there previously and had spent time with her there. Fearing for my feeling I ran back to my room. She came behind me asked why did you run away. I said I felt like I had spent time with her there, that is why I ran to my room. She told me then come let us spend some time in her room. I told her that she is going to break my heart and I don't want to go through with her that heartbreak, I can't survive the heartbreak. She went away miffed. I did not know then that she wants me to give her company. But I really felt she would leave me with feeling sorry for myself. Rohan said it must be that is the time she is convinced that you are her guardian angel. I said I will think of something to convince her to marry someone her family chooses. Tell your uncle to look for a good match for her. After coming here, I have not gone to visit my sister, she will strangle me if she comes to know I had come to Hyderabad and did not visit her. Rohan said I think your installation is completed, they will be checking the software until 31st March. We will start afresh on 1st April. So, you will have some free time until then. Go and spend some time, I will see that she gets some free time. Make her change her mind. I asked why she talks non-stop with me but if any of you present she would not talk that much? He said that must be her nervous energy. She wants to tell you so much, but instead she talks rubbish, am I correct? I said I don't know rubbish, I hardly hear what she is saying, I only hear her voice. I don't know why? He said it seems you have some hidden history with her.

I went into my thinking, what it could be. Nandini came back after 15 minutes. She asked what is our next in line. Rahul said he is saying he did not go to visit

his sister, take him to her. She said let us go. I said one second and called Loveleen asked her did she want to visit my sister? She said you go ahead, I am comfortable here. It seems after Dhruv she became complacent, that is the reason I got her into the matrimonial business. Let me give her some more time. I said let us go but first, we have to do some shopping.

I went and knocked on my sister's door, she opened the door and she called her son and said see who has come to visit us, it's your mama. He is months younger to our twins. He came and took the bags from my hand. His mother scolded him and said to me come in, who is this girl with you. You always have some girl around with you. I said she is my girlfriend, are you satisfied? I said girlfriend for Nandini's sake. We went and sat down and she asked tea? I said why not. She put the tea on the stove and came and asked what are you doing here, when did you come? I said two days back, came to install the software at their hospital indicating Nandini. Meet Nandini, who is Operations Manager at the hospital. The hospital belongs to her father. However, she did her Hospital Management from the USA, speaking two contradictory words with her. One is she is in that position because she is the daughter of the owner and the other is she is qualified for the job. Nandini said I have come to your house earlier. My sister asked when? I asked where is your mother in law? She said her daughter came and took her to their place. Nandini got up and looked at a group photo and pointed to her mother in law and said she is your mother in law, am I correct. My sister went near to the photo and looked at the person she is pointing to and said yes, she is, how did you know. Nandini said I told you so, I have met her. I said thank god you have not met her now, you would have left me and run away, and laughed aloud. My sister asked what is the joke? I said the joke is between us. Nandini looked at me as if I am talking rubbish. I said sorry to both of them. My sister said she will bring tea and went inside. Nandini asked me in a hushed tone what are you talking, Joking on me? I said what are you talking I have not seen her after my sister's marriage and she would not go out without a chaperon. Where could you have seen her? I looked at her photo, and I felt like she was talking to Nandini and telling her something about me. I looked at Nandini, she sat there sulking. I said sorry baba, you must have met her and she filled your ears about me, correct. Otherwise, why would you run away from me? She asked when did I run away from you? I asked when did you meet her, then. My sister brought tea and placed it on the table in front of us and asked what are you both fighting about like a couple? Said to me where is your wife? As if to remind me I am married. I said she is in Bombay, she has to look after the interior decorating business. You did not come to our home after we shifted to Juhu. The Last time you came to Bombay to bring your son back,

then Sneha was alive. She asked what really happened with her. I said it is a big story, to help in the hotel I sent her to the hotel run by Kirit. Now her grandfather sent some money through a known person, who frequents Bombay for business. He left her to die and took the money and ran away. He was saying it is an accident I feel it could have been deliberate, I left it to her grandfather to take necessary action. She said I still feel Sneha is the good one, I don't feel that about Sahithi. I feel she tries to get everyone into her grip. I thought my mother would have spoken highly about Sahithi, so she feels this way. I got up and said ok I will take leave, we have lots of work at the hospital. She said at least have lunch and go. I looked at Nandini, she said sorry sister, I left the work at the hospital to bring him here, he was not ready to come to your house. I said now you are blaming me, it was me who suggested to your brother I had to go and visit my sister. She said it was he who said you have not visited your sister even after two days. Looking at us my sister said, if I don't know otherwise I would have thought you two were husband and wife, you are fighting like one. Nandini blushed and I looked at my sister as if she did the right thing talking to her like that.

I wanted Nandini to feel at home with me so that I can come close and make her understand what their family wants. I think I did a good job by bringing her here. I said I will come some other time, this time I will bring kids also. She asked what is this about a kid you found. I asked are you talking about Leena? She said yes, Leena, mom told me about her. She was calling mom Naanamma and Sahithi Aayi, and you daddy. I said I still don't understand that fully, I feel she is from another universe or a time traveller, I think your husband is more interested in those things. She said when she told me I did not understand. I got up and said ok, will see you. Came out and got in the car.

After going some distance, she asked what is that in there? I said it is nothing just a joke. She was joking so I continued the joke. What is it about you meeting her mother in law? She replied that I felt I met her before and I could recognize her from the photo. I said I felt she was filling your ears against me and you got angry and went far away from me. She asked are you telling lies? I said if you are telling lies I am telling lies, if you are talking truthfully, I am also talking truthfully.

It seems she kept thinking about that throughout our journey. She did not talk anything else. When we reached the hospital, she stormed off to her cabin, left me to sit there in the parking. I picked the packet of fags on the dashboard and lit it and waited there. She came after five minutes, said sorry as if she is doing me a favour and when I exited the car locked the car and we both went inside.

She went and sat on her chair and opened the system. I sat in front of her and said what happened Nandu. She lifted her head and asked what did you just say? I said what happened? She said after that, I said Nandu. She said I know it was you that called me Nandu, no one else ever called me Nandu. I thought I caught her weak point. Ok, what happened Nandu. She said when you did not believe me, who else will believe me. No one believed me then, no one believes me now. I said I am not saying I did not believe you, all I am saying is if I believe what you said then you will leave me heartbroken, that will also happen. So, why should I believe you, to have a breakup? She said no, no, I don't want to break up with you. I said if you had met her before, you must have remembered what she said. Nandini said that is what I can't recollect, what she said. I said then where did you meet her, in your dreams? She said yeh, it might be in my dream. I said you told me that I called you Nandu before when was it. She said long back, when the thief came you came to rescue me and you spent the whole night with me. I said what did we do the whole night? She said we watched tv, we played cards, then we dozed off on the sofa. Then in the morning, I left you in my car at your sister's house. That's how I know where she lives. Then when you wrote to me you are coming to Hyderabad, I went there to meet you. You were not there and your sister was not there, that's when I met your sister's mother in law. Then you don't remember what she said. She shook her head and no I don't remember anything she said. I said thank god, you don't remember anything. She said why are you saying it like that. I said if you promise me that you will never believe what she says, then I can be your friend. She said ok, I will not believe what she said or will say, now are you satisfied?

Now I have to make her believe I am not her guardian angel or anything, she might be thinking about me. If I let her know about Sunitha or Loveleen, will she forget about me or will she develop hatred for me and start to hate everyone. She may not accept marrying anyone as she was doing until now. What could be the best action in these circumstances? She looked up from the keyboard and asked what are you thinking. I said how to marry you. She exclaimed you are already married twice. I said that is the only problem. Shall we kill my wife? She said don't talk like that. I said I am just joking, why would I kill the wife, I loved and married. She said I forgot yours is a love marriage. How could you have love marriage with two girls? I said I am thinking of having a third love marriage.

She must have thought I was pulling her leg, laughed and said what a joke.

If marrying is a joke to her she might be ready to marry someone. I said you know we are starting a Pan India Matrimonial Service. She asked what is it Pan India? I said if you register here your profile will be available throughout India.

How is possible she asked. I said it is our software technology. We are having a joint venture with a courier company for having branches all over India. She said is it so, you did not tell me. I said recently we have collaborated on this, we have registered a company for that it is called Pan India Matrimonial Services P Ltd. If you register here your data will be transferred to all the branches. Give me your profile, I will get it registered free on our server. She asked you are also charging for this service. I said who wants to do it for free, of course, we are charging, as a special case, I would get you registered on our server. She asked then, what will happen. I said then someone will see your profile and think who is this beautiful, intelligent working woman? I should meet her. She said then. He will come to your house for meeting you. She said then. I said then you will reject him saying who is this fool who came to my house and he is not my type. She said why would I do that? I might marry him. I said if you marry him, you will regret your whole life. She said why would I regret it? I might love him. I said let us see, whose word is correct, give me your details. She said why I would give you my details, I will ask my father to look for a match. I said then I will call him and say to him, look for a match for you. Why I will let you do that, I will call him myself. I said let us see who will call him first. I reached for the phone. She snatched the phone from me and made a call. I kept looking at her as I dare you to tell him. Seeing me daring her, she spoke dad I want to get married you were telling me about the match from Vizag. I am ready to get married. She heard what he said and cut the call looked at me triumphantly. I made a sad face and said you have won. I told her I will have a fag and come and went out of her room and went straight to Rohan's room. I asked the attender is he free? He went and looked and said you can go. I went inside and congratulated him. Waited for his reaction. I said you speak with your uncle, then you will congratulate me on my efforts. He rang and spoke with his uncle. He said ok and cut the phone and said Nandini agreed to get married. How did you do it? I said I used reverse psychology. He asked how? I said I was telling her you won't like the boy if I get him through our matrimonial services. She said why won't I like him, I will ask my father for getting me a match. I dared if you don't call, I will call. I was reaching for the phone and she snatched it from me called your uncle and spoke to him. Now are you happy? He said let's celebrate in the evening. I said I told her I will have a fag and come, come let us have a fag and then we will go to her cabin. We went to the parking and had a fag and then returned to her cabin. I said to Rohan let us go and have a look at her face. We went inside and she looked at me and said what did you do? I asked what did I do? Nothing. She said angrily you made a fool of me. Rohan asked what did he do? She did not want to come out in the open in front of Rohan. But could not contain her anger

and complained to her brother he made me tell dad to look for a groom for me. He said what is wrong with that? I am happy you agreed to marry someone. She said with irritation in her voice it is not that, he forced me to tell dad that. I asked innocently did I force you to tell your dad? Did I ring your dad and put a gun to your head and told you to tell your father that you are ready to marry and look for a groom? She said you don't have to put a gun to my head, you put a gun to my heart. I exclaimed now you are telling him that I put a gun to your heart. Where is the gun? She said now you are confusing me. I said then calmly tell him what happened. She said Kumar is saying he wants to marry a third time. I stopped her and said I did not say I want to marry you. I told you I want to have a third love marriage. She said before that did you not say I want to marry you. I said I did not say that When you asked what are you thinking, I said how to marry you. Then what you said aren't you married twice. Then you wanted to kill your wife, she accused me. Then what did I say why would I kill the one loved and married. This went on for some time you said I said. At last, she is annoyed with me and stormed off the room. I looked at Rohan and said she will have to agree to get married, if you can't find a match, we are running a matrimonial service, I can find a suitable match anywhere in India. He said uncle has already had some matches in mind, I think he will finalize someone. Let me know if she throws any tantrums. I found her weak point, I just had to call her Nandu. He asked what is it? Her guardian angel called her Nandu. He said oh, ok. I asked what do you call her at home. We all call her Nandini only.

I said let us see how it goes, I am always there to help her.

Chapter 3

Kumar

1st April 1994. I had cleared the data and gave them fresh data with the application. They have started to run the system and the results were satisfactory. I went and checked with the departments and everything running smoothly. I and Loveleen went and looked at the plot of land near Nandini's house and decided to purchase it and gave them an advance. Also, the flat in Rohan's building. We took the total ground floor and decided to have our offices there. We also took one more flat in the same floor as Rohan, now we are neighbours to Rohan. We called the supervisor from Loveleen's Bombay office and they engaged local people to work on the office and flat. We expected them to be ready in three months' time. For the time being Nandini provided a room in their hospital for running our branch. We transferred one of the developers here to look after the hospital programs and modifications if needed. Setting up everything in Hyderabad we returned to Bombay. As the offices were being set up in Hyderabad, we decided to postpone our trip to other places.

We enquired with Godrej and their application is running and they are still making some adjustments in the application as the rules are not defined properly. The excise department is coming out with a rule per day. So, our people are ready with the changes and updating the servers there. The matrimonial application is being installed at the branches in a phased manner. We went and checked the branch at Hyderabad. They have been trained and learned to run the application and are ready to transfer the data. Some test data has been sent and received and the results are as expected. We booked our return tickets for going to Bombay. Rohan said he will give a party at his flat. I said it is better we had the party at our hotel as not to disturb Dhruv's routine. I feel Nandini suspects something between us on Dhruv. Rohan and Nandini had come with two bottles of whiskey and we started our party. This time they targeted Loveleen about her story. First, she refused to say anything saying what story would I have. After a little cajoling, she started to tell her story. She said she was born and brought up in Delhi. Their family is from a line of politicians. She had completed her degree from Delhi University and she started her training in an interior decoration firm. Their family fixed her alliance with Guru with the intention of increasing their business. Then Guru started to expand his business and shifted to Bombay and she had come with him to Bombay. With her experience in Interior designing and with a little help from Guru financially she started her interior decoration firm in Bombay. With her

looks and his financial backing, her business prospered and she shifted her firm to Andheri. When after three years of their marriage, she was not pregnant and with pressure from his family her mother took her to a gynecologist and had her checked. After through tests and the doctor declared that she has no problem to give children and asked them to check her husband. He was reluctant to get checked at first but his family had put pressure on him and it was he who had a problem as his sperm had no motility and low count. The final result is that he is infertile and impotent. After it came out he became a different man altogether. To make her pregnant he has taken to different ways which are difficult to explain, as a doctor Rohan can understand. He went to the extent of bringing his friends and started to pressure her to sleep with them. Unable to bear the constant harassment, she had complained to her family and they had in turn complained to his family. His family had called him back to Delhi. As her business is booming, she refused to go to Delhi to be with him. Rest of the story they have heard from Kumar and she concluded her story. Rohan had a question for her. He asked her what about Dhruv, it seems as your husband is impotent, he can't be his father. She said shyly I had used drugs on Kumar obtained his sperm without his knowledge. I expressed my surprise and said Dhruv is my son and got up and held him to me. This way Nandini would not suspect I had lied to them. It is the truth also, only I knew Dhruv is my son from the time she was pregnant.

I looked at Nandini and she looked at me accusingly. I shook my head as if I really did not know. We completed the party and they called for a cab and went to their flat. I think Nandini also went with him to his flat. I did not receive any information on her alliance and they must be looking through the alliances received. I thought if they have the information they will let me know or when she rejects all the alliances brought to her, then they will certainly inform me.

We went to our rooms for sleeping.

6th April, we are ready to board the flight at Hyderabad airport. It seems the flight is delayed and I thought I will inform our driver about our delayed flight. I called Pauleen and she said we were trying to contact you. I asked what happened? She said Leena is missing. I asked how. They all have come out of their classes and the driver was waiting outside. He saw them coming towards the car. Atul and Reena were walking in the front and Leena was a little behind. She called them and they turned around looking at her and she just disappeared into thin air. They searched all around and they could not find her anywhere. The driver went to the police station and filed a report with the police, he is scared that you will scold him. I said to tell him not to worry, she must have

gone back to her house. I am at the airport and the flight is delayed by one hour. Send him to the airport one hour late. She said ok. I said bye be seeing you.

I came back to Loveleen and explained what happened with Leena. She said you were not worried she is missing. I said I always suspected that she will go back someday. She was to be raised by the old people and they were dead and destiny brought her here to be looked after. Now it must be the time she would have been found by their family, so she returned. The destiny had a way of doing the things right. I am happy for her and her mother. She would be happy.

The boarding has been announced and we got up and went and sat at our seats.

We got down in Bombay in 45 minutes and took us another 20 minutes to collect our baggage and come out of the airport. Sahithi was waiting with the driver. I asked her what are you doing here? She hugged me and started crying. I said don't cry, she went back to you only. She did not want to hurt you anymore so she went to you in the future. Don't worry you will be happy in the future. With those words, she rubbed her eyes and we went and sat in the car. Sahithi took Dhruv, kissed him and sat him on her lap.

We reached home and Atul and Reena came running. Daddy Leena disappeared in front of our eyes. She called us and when we turned she just disappeared. I said she came to see you all and now she went back to her house.

I removed the gifts brought for them and passed them on to them.

Sahithi

When the kids returned from their school and informed me that Leena had disappeared, I had lost my cool. I scolded them how that could be possible. You were jealous of her and left her somewhere. When Pauleen informed Kumar when he rang up from the airport, he told her to take it easy as she must have returned to her original parents. Then I had cooled down and my fear had decreased. I don't know how Kumar would react. Now he has taken it easy and he would not scold anyone. Even though I am not scared, I went to the airport to see his reaction. He has taken the matter coolly. Instead of shouting at me, he had comforted me saying she has gone back to a future me. I don't know if that is possible. At least if she is with her family, I am happy.

Sunitha

Kumar came back after ten days. I am waiting to meet him. Earlier I was away a lot, nowadays he is away. Why did he take Loveleen with him? He said they

were planning for expanding. Now I was told they had purchased three properties. One open land near Nandini's house. What is his interest in Nandini, I can't understand. Another flat beside her brother's flat. And an office space in the same building. How did he get the money for all these investments? Did Loveleen did the investments. It seems she wants to invest her husband's money. In whose name these investments are made? However, I feel Kumar is going on super-fast with his ideas and investments. Even if one of his ideas fails, then his whole empire will fall down like a house of cards. Is he aware of the dangers? It is my duty to support him, whatever may the outcome.

Now I will be busy with finalizing accounts. I have to look at these three companies' finances. There will be a lot of movement of finances between companies. I have taken an appointment with the CA for finalizing accounts.

Mahira

The firm I am running is doing well. I have checked the financial position at the year-end. Even though we are short on liquid cash after supplying computers to Nandini's hospital, it is a good order. As we have not received the payment, it is better to transfer the sale to this year. If we don't get paid on time, we can't write it off. I don't know what is his idea of supplying them without payment or even an advance. It seems she has hooked him. Now he went personally to install the software there. He could have sent one of the developers. After finishing he asked the developer to be sent there. Over that he had taken Loveleen with him. I can't decide for whom he had gone there, for Nandini or Loveleen. After his marriage is fixed Kirit is not contacting me. Nowadays, I don't need him to drop me at the clients. I can take one of the cars to meet the clients. Life has become a little dull. I don't have anyone in my life. I had not thought of Kirit as someone who will be a permanent companion. But I felt good while it lasted. It was Kumar who had broken us by bringing Nishitha in between us. He must have thought as they both are Gujarathis, they would be good for each other. What happened finally, it was her father who decided their kundali has not matched and cancelled their engagement. But my present position, I couldn't have achieved without Kumar. Whatever he had done, he had done for all of us. He has thought about all of us. He is a true friend for all of us.

PART 6

Kumar shifts his attention to Hyderabad

Chapter 1

Kumar

Now we entered the new financial year. Pan India Matrimonial company's accounts will be looked after by the courier company. We have to look at our three companies. We have to check the profits of the three companies and think of billing expenses for the Interior decoration firm.

I have to call Shakha Pramukh and let him know I have returned. I called him. He said there were some proposals for seat sharing. I asked him which parties have approached them and what seats they are asking? If you give me a kind of list I will run them through the software and come up with some predictions. He said I will send the details with my man. I said do that and I will let you know.

I thought if I could have met Mr. Naidu in Hyderabad, but could not get to meet him. It is imperative for his party to win the elections for the software to be a success in India.

There is still time for elections in Maharashtra. Can we turn the tide in their favour? Always the party in power has the advantage. They can announce something before the elections are announced. How the seat sharing will affect the elections. What if the ruling party also go for seat sharing. This has to be kept in consideration for calculations.

Now Leena has gone back to her timeline, I had to change the kid's firms shares. As the three kids are my own I don't need to show any preference to anyone. It is only what Loveleen thinks about. I don't think she feels to give Dhruv any preference over Atul and Reena.

I went and sat in my office and opened the laptop and started typing. My phone rang and it's Nandini. I said how are you doing Nandu. She said I am doing fine, why I called because we got an appointment with Mr. Naidu for tomorrow, can you come over today. I said I will try to catch a flight tonight. I cut the call and called our travel agent and told him to book a ticket to Hyderabad today or tonight. It has to be today and whatever class does not matter, I want a ticket. He said he will check and let me know. He called back after half an hour and said he got a first-class ticket for 9 pm flight. I said ok, I will send my driver to pickup the ticket. I went and informed Loveleen about going to Hyderabad. She said she wanted to come but at this short time she can't be prepared. I said I knew, I only booked for myself. I will complete the work and come in two days' time, hold the fort here. I informed Nandini about my flight timing.

I packed my bag and informed Sahithi that I am going to Hyderabad on an emergency and called the driver and told him to leave me at the Airport. I took the flight and was in Hyderabad by 10 pm. I came out of the Airport and Nandini is waiting for me. I told her why did you come, I would have gone to the hotel. I came to take you to Rohan's flat. I put my handbag in the back seat and sat beside her. I asked what is the news. She said everything is running smooth. We went to the flat and she opened the door with a key. I asked where is Rohan. She said he had emergency surgery, he will be back in an hour or two. I put the bag down and sat on the sofa. She brought a bottle of whiskey and a glass. I asked are you not drinking? She said when Rohan comes, she had to go back home. She poured me a drink and gave me the glass. I sipped and put down the glass. I lit a fag and smoked. When I completed the fag, I picked the glass and sipped the drink. I completed the peg and put the glass down, I felt drowsy and I sat back and everything went black. I got up around 7 am. Seeing me Nandini went and brought me a cup of coffee. I asked you are not having, she said I just had. I asked her you were supposed to go back home. You did not go. Rohan's surgery lasted late and I stayed back. I asked why am I sleeping on the sofa. She said you slept sitting on the sofa, so I let you sleep on the sofa. It seemed confusing but I let it ride. I got up went to the bathroom, brushed and came out. Nandini preparing breakfast, by the time I returned from bathing, she put it on the table. We had our breakfast and I asked her what time we are expecting to see Mr. Naidu. She said we have to confirm the time, I will let you know when the time is confirmed. I removed my laptop and started typing. She asked what are you doing. I said I am writing my autobiography. She asked can I read it? I said you have to wait for it to be published. Why can't I read before? She asked. I said you can read when I finish the book and get it published. She said when you go to bathroom, I will read what you are writing. I said I know that that's why the data of this book is encrypted. What is it she asked? I said you can't read it without the password. She asked who has the password. I said I am going to leave the floppy and password with my lawyer. She said oh, you don't want it to be read by anyone now. She made a call and came back and said Mr. Naidu has not returned from Delhi. As soon as he returns they will inform us. I sat back and looked at her. I said what will we do now. She said you continue writing, I will sit with you and see what are you writing. I said come here and touched the sofa beside me. She came and sat beside me. I asked tell me, what do you want? She shook her head and said nothing. I said I know you are expecting something from me that's why you called me to come early, I suppose the meeting is for tomorrow, correct? She nodded and said yes. I asked what yes? She said the meeting is not for today, it is for tomorrow. So, what do you really

want? By the way where is Rohan. She said Rohan went to a conference in Calcutta, and I want to know what you gave me then. I asked what did I give you and when? She said when you came to me, you gave me something valuable. I want it again. I asked do you meant in 1987, what I gave you then how would I remember? What age were you then? She said 20. I said so when you were 20 and when I came to you and I gave you something valuable. So, what is it? I gave you a kiss. She said more valuable than that. I said then a hug. She said no, more valuable than that. I asked what valuable than that? Don't tell me you had sex with me that day. She said shyly yes, we had sex. I could not believe myself, how can that be possible, is it to do with another dimension. Did my other self visit from another dimension or did she have dreamt that I had visited? She said she had dropped me at my sister's place and she went there again when I wrote to her I would be visiting. She also said she had met my sister's mother in law, what did she say? Is it her dream or has happened the way she says it happened? How to make her believe that it was not me who had come to her house. But why did I have that weird feeling when I saw her room? Did I really meet her there? Did I really have sex with her then? If it had been me I would have remembered something. If it was 1987, then I never visited Hyderabad. During that time, I was mentally down with Sneha being gone away from me. What it could be? We have visited Hyderabad for my sister's wedding in 1986. Then when Sneha went missing I had gone back to Bombay with my heart broken. Is it that the heartbreak I was thinking of when I told Nandini that you will break my heart? Does it have anything to do with Sneha being away? It is all confusing. If what Nandini says she had dropped me at my sister's place, my sister would have remembered me coming to her house. If Nandini went to her place when she was away then she would have remembered that too. Could she remember all this after so long? Forget about the past let me think about the present. What should I do now? Shall I agree to her proposal or shall I make her understand that it is not the correct way of society? What does her future husband think of her if he found out about her? She sat beside me, turned towards me put both hands around me and asked what are you thinking for so long? Her chest was touching my hand and I was losing my patience. Out of frustration, I shouted at her don't you understand, that was not me. She trembled with fear on hearing my shouting. I came to my senses and said I am sorry, I am sorry and hugged her and kissed her on the cheeks. She hugged me hard and did not let me go. I loosened my hand from her behind, still, she would not let me go. I said did you get scared? She said when you shouted like that you were looking like the devil himself. I said I am sorry I don't know what came into me, I never shouted like that. I am sorry and held her face in my hand kissed her

on the mouth. It was an act to cool her down. But she took that otherwise and she must have thought I am giving her permission to go ahead. She started to kiss me on the mouth and cheeks and she went into a frenzy. I tried to control myself and tried to push her. But I could not control myself for long. It felt like I was in the past and seeing what is happening then. I was back in her bedroom and I was aroused and I saw myself do those things she accused me of doing. Having satiated herself she let me go and sat down. I looked at her and I was looking at her as she looked in 1987. Did I go back in time to have sex with her in 1987? I felt like I was in a trance and sat on the sofa. I came back to this world when she shook me saying Kumar where did you go away, come back. I looked at her like stupid. Then I was back into conscience. I asked her what happened? She said what happened, you became wild with your sex drive. Did you always behave like this in bed? I said I don't remember what happened now. I was back in 1987 with you on that day. We had a wonderful day. Now I remember what I have done that day. She said see, you remembered what you did, nobody would believe me. I said I won't myself believe me.

I said let us go to my sister's house. She asked now? Why? I said I had to confirm something with her. We sat in the car and we drove to her house. We got down and rang the doorbell. My sister opened the door and her son is behind her. I gave him ten rupees note and said go and get some chocolates. He ran out. She said twice in a month. I said I had to confirm something with you. When did I come to your house last time? She said last month. I said before that. She said never. I said if I had never visited you, how come I know your house? She said that's what I thought. Then I thought you must have taken address from dad. I said I never came to your house, I don't know your address and still, I guided her to your house. It has never come to my mind that I don't know your address and still I told her to let us go shopping we need to visit my sister. She is saying she knew your address and she came here and met your mother in law and she doesn't remember what she said. Nandini said now I remember what she said. She said you came here to write your degree final year exams. You were not studying in Bombay as you claimed. That was when I got angry. I said I studied my degree from Hyderabad, I never claimed I studied in Bombay, did I. But I have not stayed here during exams. I wrote my exams in 1984 and I was staying with my grandfather and Sneha and running my other grandfather's business.

I told my sister last time we were in Hyderabad we were purchasing some properties. We purchased a plot of land near her house and a flat for office purposes and a flat for residential purposes. When we open our offices here, I will call you for the inauguration. She said sure, I will come. I said see you then,

we came out of the house and got in the car. I asked her what were you saying in there? She said I remembered what her mother in law told me when I visited. I asked her when did you visit? It was 1988 during the summer. I remember, the ac in the car was not working properly and it was very hot. During the summer of 1988, I was working in the factory alone and Kirit was in Nasik. Sneha did not yet return from Vijayawada. I might have got information that she had twins. She did not return for another three months. Sahithi and I might have just married. Still, I was nowhere near Hyderabad, why her mother in law would talk like that. I did not meet her after the marriage. I don't think she would know much about me. Where her thoughts were coming from? What she did not remember previously, how she can remember now all of a sudden. Did our afternoon have something to do with it? Instead of me understanding the situation, it had become more of a mystery. It seems my timelines are getting mixed up. Does it have something to do with Leena disappearing now. How long Leena was here, probably three years. But what 1987 and 1988 has to do with my life? Is it turning point in my life somehow, I don't know nothing about it.

(Note: Readers are advised to read *Unlucky in Love: My Autobiography* by R Kumar for knowing exactly what happened between Kumar and Nandini in 1987 and 1988).

We returned back to the hospital and I checked with the developer stationed there about the progress of the work. He did not have any work as no bugs were reported from the users. I said if you don't have any work why don't you visit other hospitals and have a look at them. If possible to meet their operations manager or someone like them. We could possibly get some orders. If you can contact them possibly I will send someone or myself to go to meet them. Or you can show them some demos. So much can be done. He said he will follow my instructions.

I was back in the Nandini's cabin. I asked her did you remember what happened after you visited my sister's house and spoke to her mother in law. She replied no, it might come later. I sat there chatting with her until she completed her work and said let us go home. I asked are we going to your house? She said we have Rohan's flat for ourselves, why go home? I thought your parents must have called you to come home. She said nothing like that, they know I stay at Rohan's when I don't come home. It is he who calls home if he did not find me there. I said oh, you two must be close. She said yes, that's why I choose the same profession. He wanted to be Surgeon, I know I don't want to be a doctor, I wanted to be manager, I wanted to manage people, I want to be boss, so, I choose this. I said I did not know what I want to be so I went with the flow. She

said but you are a successful businessman and you must be having lots of money the way you invest it. I said it is not all my money, some of it is my company's and some of it is Loveleen's. She asked did she really did that? I asked what did she do? She said as she told she gave you drugs and made you lose conscience and extracted semen from you and got pregnant. I said how would I know if I am unconscious, what she did. I have no idea. I never thought she would have done something like that. Maybe if she asked I would have given her myself. In fact, I had a funny dream about that. I had dreamt that she was looking at me with disgust in her face. It has followed me for sometime until it really happened. Nandini asked did she look with disgust in her face. I said it has nothing to do with our relation, when she received the news that house was ransacked she did have that look. Then I took a breath that she did not hate me.

Nandini asked what if she hates you? I said I don't know I don't like it when people hate me, then I don't want to be around them. I keep my distance from such people. That might be the reason I have very few friends. She asked do you think your friends hate you? I don't know I don't keep long-distance friendships. I only meet them when I am in their city. Maybe I only call them when I have some work with them. She said you called me to inquire about me. That means I am special to you, correct? I said you were always special to me.

We reached the flat and she opened the door and we entered and set down my bag on the table. I said I will freshen up and come, my mind is not where it should be. She said she will prepare a snack or something to eat.

I had a head bath and changed and came and sat down on the sofa. She came with some pakodies and a bottle of whiskey and set it on the table. When I am inspecting the bottle, she said don't worry it is not the same bottle as yesterday. I wanted to do what Loveleen did to you, but did not get the courage to do it and over that what is the fun in that. I poured myself a drink and she brought a glass and poured herself a drink. We had two pegs and I started working on my writing. She waited for some time and said let us go for dinner. There is a nearby restaurant, we can go by walk and come back. I looked at the time it is after 9 pm. I closed the laptop and said let us go. We walked to the restaurant and I looked around and asked did we come here previously. She said no, we did not come here. I said I feel I have been here. Did we go to the restaurant in 1987? She thought going to the restaurant, yes, we went by car to the restaurant. Is it a repeat of 1987 or what? After coming back from the restaurant what did we do? She replied we had a night out. I asked where did we go? She replied we did not go anywhere, we spent it indoors only. I said you

mean to say we spent our whole night without sleep? She said shyly you can say that.

We completed dinner and returned to the flat and I sat down before the laptop and started to write. Nandini sat beside me and put her hand on my shoulder and looked over my shoulder at what I am typing. I remembered what Sahithi did before I asked her to marry. She was looking over my shoulder at what I am reading. I closed the book and asked her to get married. Now I don't have any intention of proposing to her. I turned and looked into her eyes. There is a sparkle in her eyes. It is not lust, as I might have expected. What was in her mind? She seemed immersed in what I was writing. I wrote that I had an inspiration and wrote some software code on a piece of paper and we went and had a fag and the paper flew away into Mr. Kathuria. It was the scene where I have entered into software coding. After reading she said this is how you entered into software development. I said that was just the beginning. I found out that I had a talent for finding bugs. She asked were you biologist? I asked what? She said it is what they do, biologists, finding bugs. I said no not that kind of bugs, software bugs, problems in the software. I had done a thorough sweep through the software before installing here. That's why we don't get errors. She said so that means you find errors in the coding. I said yes, finding errors in the software is called finding bugs. Then what happened she asked? I said I am writing, if you want I will let you read while I am writing. She said no, I don't want to read while you are typing, I better look at you. Your face fascinates me while you are typing. Your face shows the emotions you felt when that happened. If you are writing a sad scene, your face becomes sad. I said enough of writing and closed the application and shut down the laptop. She said I know how to stop you from working. I asked is this your way of stopping me from working? There is a smile on her face. I reached for her lips and kissed her. She must be surprised by my sudden action, she took aback and looked at me, and then she caught my head in her hands and pulled me towards her and kissed me hard. This turned into a frenzy of activity from both of us and it led us to the bedroom. There I don't know about her but I went back in time. I don't know how much time we spend there when I woke up it is 7 am. I looked at Nandini sleeping beside me. She looked like a sculpture with life in her. I kissed her on the cheeks and got up and went to the bathroom for brushing.

It is after 11 am and we were in the party office and one attender showed us where to wait for Mr. Naidu. I stood at the door and looked inside. There were sofas arranged in the L shape. On a sofa, a lady was sitting, I could see her profile. I could never forget that face, it is Dolly. I stopped at the door and took a

step back. Nandini said in a whisper what happened? I took her aside and pointed to the lady sitting on the sofa and said she is Dolly a gangster from Bombay. They have cheated banks and high-class people. She asked how do you know. I said I told you when I had to save Kirit from some gangsters, it is her. She asked what shall we do. You go and engage her by talking to her. I will go and find some security or police and rushed out. Seeing me running one policeman stopped and asked why are you running? I asked him do you have your superior officer nearby. He said we have our SI there. I said go and call him, a big gangster is sitting in Mr. Naidu's waiting room. I don't know what she came for. How do you know she is a gangster? I showed him my card and said I am from Bombay, we came across her many times. The Nashik Police and Bombay Police are looking for her. Go fast and get some policemen. He went and called his SI and some policemen. He came over to me and said is your information correct? I said we had spent some time with her before knowing about her background. Come fast, my friend is sitting with her. When we entered the room, she got up and tried to move around them. They caught her and took her to their police station. SI called me to come with him. Mr. Naidu's PA looking at us what is happening? I went to him and he asked what happened? She is a big gangster in Maharashtra, and she is wanted by police in Bombay and Nashik. He asked how do you know? I said we were looking for her for the last six years. That time she just slipped from the police net. Can you reorganize our meeting with Mr. Naidu? He said I will see what I can do, you go and see what they want. We went to police station with them and they booked a case against her and called up Nashik police and confirmed that Dolly is wanted in a case there. I gave my written report and gave my card and gave the hospital address, if they want to contact me. After one hour we went back to the party office and met his PA. He said come in Mr. Naidu is waiting for you, he had pushed his other meetings. We went and met him and explained what I do for the elections. I told if you give us the data from the last elections we can give you predictions based on different scenarios. He said we are planning to go for seat-sharing with BJP. I said if you give me some data, I can give some idea of what can be done. He asked what kind of data do you need? I said the past election results data, which candidate got how many votes. He said I think we can provide that. How can you do that? I said we have helped Haryana's present government in winning the elections. The CM's daughter is our partner in the software business. We feed the data and we check different scenarios and come out with a combination. We are working with Maharashtra Sena at this time. He asked what are you doing with them. I said we are strengthening the party from the grassroots. Recently they had a meeting in our bungalows for finalizing the

agenda for the coming elections. How he asked? We took ideas from the members to serve the people. The only way to win elections is for the people to believe they will not get a raw deal after elections. We got them to do some welfare activities before elections, so they will believe in the party. He asked do we need to do that here? I said the people already believe in the party, a small push is required from the party to win elections. I think seat sharing will do the trick. If you win the elections, don't forget to give a boost to the software industry. He asked why? I said I see the future of the software industry here in Hyderabad. We are going to invest here. He said I will get the data for you, where it should be sent? Nandini gave her card and said send it to me, I will pass on to him. He read and said so you are a hospital administrator. I said I have come to install the software in their hospital. He said if you come through for us in the elections, we have some hospitals where we would like to introduce the software. We took the leave and came out. Nandini said catching the Dolly has helped in us getting a meeting. I looked at her and asked don't we have an appointment to meet Mr. Naidu. Rahul said go and meet his PA he will arrange a meeting with him. I asked are we going to gate crash a meeting with him. Oh, great. She said it all worked out in the end. We caught two birds with one arrow. I said I think it is one shot. She said whatever you caught your criminal mastermind and you got to meet Mr. Naidu. I said thanks for your help. She asked are you thanking me sarcastically? I said no, I am really thankful for your help.

We returned to Rohan's flat. We changed and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv.

Nandini put her hand behind me caught me and snuggled up and sat. Her chest was touching my back. I thought she sat like that purposefully. There is a romantic scene going on the tv. I turned to her kissed her on the cheeks. She turned her head and kissed me on the lips. We went to the bedroom and continued our escapades. This time it was different with me, I don't know about Nandini, I felt I was in this world, unlike the last two times where I was transported back to 1987. Why I did not understand. I looked at Nandini lay beside me. I felt the same emotion that she has given me heartache. She is sleeping beside me and I am still feeling a heartache from her, why. Is she possessive about me and would not tolerate seeing me with other women? But what can I do, I have already married two women and had affair with the other two women. Fearing heartache from her I have kept her away for all these times. I think I better break up with her using her own possessiveness. But I should give her time before doing that, otherwise, my payments with the

hospital will be stuck. I have to receive payments for software and hardware supplied to her. Even though I have not supplied them for this relationship with her, but had to continue this for the sake of our company. Then I can break the news of other women in my life to her and she may herself move away from me. Or shall I offer her a partnership with our firm? How that making her partner would help me, rather it would help her trouble us by putting breaks on everything we do at the firm. As a director, she can block my ideas to take revenge on me. At present all the board members listen to me and vote for my ideas. If there is an avenging angel on the board, I don't know what she can do. It is better to keep her away from our firm. She turned towards me put her hand on me. Her boobs are touching my hand. I felt myself aroused by her touch. What is happening with me why I am getting aroused by her touch? Does she have so much control over my emotions? Even knowing her feeling towards me, why am I getting feelings about her. If there are no feeling then there won't be heartache. Why am I having feeling for all these women. Normally a person can have love for one person. But why I am getting connected with all these people. Why there is a strong connection I am having with these ladies. Why I want to keep them close. Why I want to keep Loveleen safe. Is her life being in danger as her husband's? Who was behind the murder of Guru? For the purpose of political mileage, I have said her father had him murdered. But it can't be true, because then Guru's family would want to take revenge. They must be aware that her father is not to be blamed for Guru's death. Otherwise, after all these rumours, something would have happened. Or else they would have gained from him being CM, they would have supported him in elections, knowingly it was Guru who will be targeted. How they would have felt about Guru's death. I don't know much about their family. I need to get more information about them from Loveleen. Nandini touched my crouch are you going to say what are you thinking? I felt aroused by her touch and said about you only. She asked then what are you thinking? I said how marvellous is our lovemaking is. She said do you think so? I said let us try again and check it out.

It's now 7 pm and I said shall we go out or shall we cook something here. Nandini said I don't know if we have something for cooking. I said then let us go out. She said I will get ready and come. I asked her what are the happening places around here. She replied I heard from a friend there is a Jazz bar opened recently, shall I check? I said please. She called her friend and told me that its nearby, shall we go? I said what are you waiting for. She went inside and dressed and came out. I am seeing her in a different version. She looked most modern in her dress. She said let us go. We went down to the parking and she took Rohan's car and we went to the bar she mentioned. We went and sat down

at a table. On the stage, Jazz music is being played by a band. It is a new experience for me. Normally I don't go to bars or dancing places. So, I sat there enjoyed the music with my drink. We ordered some snacks with our drinks.

When the concert finished we went out to a nearby restaurant and had dinner and returned to Rohan's flat. I sat down on the sofa and called Nandini to come close. She came and stood before me, I pulled her into my lap and kissed her and said you are looking sexy. She asked am I? I said you are damn sexy and started kissing her. Which turned into a frenzy and we had our final act together. She moved away from me, and I went and changed and went into the bedroom and lay on the bed. She came and lay beside me. I looked at her and she had changed into night wear. I looked at her and looked at the ceiling. How to get her to marry her parent's choice. She turned towards me and put her hand on my chest and kissed me on the cheek. I looked at her and turned my gaze towards the ceiling. She asked what are you looking on the ceiling. I said you see that dot on the ceiling, I am looking at it. She said there is no dot on the ceiling. I said that's what I am telling, I not looking at anything. She said sometimes you talk funny. I asked then why aren't laughing? She asked what? I said if I am talking funny, why are you not laughing. She said not that kind of funny. I said now I know there are many kinds of funny. She said there is no use in arguing with you. I said then don't argue with me. She looked sharply at me and I sat on the bed. She asked what happened to you suddenly? I said I want you to marry the match fixed by your parents. She asked why should I marry at your suggestion? It is not a suggestion it is a request I said. She said angrily who are you to give me suggestions or requests? I said you ask your heart who I am. She put her hand on her heart and said who is Kumar? It is not answering. I said I know the answer must have reached your brain, but you don't want it to come out in the open. Now tell me what is it saying. She said you are my well-wisher. I said see now you know why I am telling you this. She said I want to wait for some time before accepting the match from my parents. I asked what will you do until then? She said until I am married, I want to be with you. I said ok, you want to be with me, you are here and I am there. She said I will come with you to Bombay. I thought in Bombay already three ladies had their hooks into me. I said if you come there behind me, Sahithi will kill me and bury me in the sand behind our house. Nandini said she will not know. I asked why she will not know? She said do you think I don't know what you do with Sunitha in her office. I put my innocent face and asked what do I do in her office? She hesitated to use the f word and finally said you make love to her in her office and Joy told me. I thought it is Joy's work to put fire in our relationship. I said what she knew about us, some times we have to discuss some matters related

to software development. I put Sunitha to spy on them to know what are they doing not completing development. Joy must have found out and filled your ears in anticipation of you spreading the rumours. She said do I look like spreading rumours? That's what I am saying, she expected you to spread her rumour and you did not fall for her deceit. She asked do you think she wants me to spread rumours? I said otherwise why would she tell lies. If ten people say a lie it becomes the truth. She said yes, you are correct and again lay beside me putting her hand on my chest and making circles on my chest. When a woman does that means she wants to ask something. She said can you give me a child? I said what? She said give me a kid. I said if you marry, your husband will give you children, how many you may want. She said I want from you. I said how that is possible, what your parent may say. What the society will say. What will he be called, fatherless child? She said you can give Loveleen a son, why can't you give me one. I said did I sleep with her giving her son. She has done it secretly, I did not even know until she told you that day. She said really you did not know, tell me. I said I suspected she had done something like that when her father has announced it on national television. Because when her supposed impregnation she was in Bombay only. Nandini asked but why you can't give me a child? I said at the time of her announcement of pregnancy she has her husband beside her. As a final word to stop her from arguing more on the topic I said you get yourself a husband then I will think about it. She said promise. I said promise. With the act of getting a promise from me, she turned the other side and slept. I thought when would she ask me to fulfil her promise that too after getting married, would she get married to a person like Guru? I would not want my worst enemy if she is a woman to get married to a guy like Guru.

I drifted off to sleep and got up as if some one woke me up. It has become a problem for me I could not sleep it off even on Sundays, I always wake up as if some one tapping me or with a jolt or something. I did not understand, why.

I got up went to the bathroom, brushed and went to the kitchen made two cups of coffee and woke Nandini and told her to have coffee. She said let me sleep yaar. I caught the bedsheet on her with the intention of pulling it. When I saw her naked underneath, I let it drop and sorry and put the coffee and came back to the hall and sat on the sofa. She came after two minutes with the coffee cup in her hand and asked what were you saying. I said sorry. She asked why sorry, what did you do. I said I was about to pull the bedsheet from you, then saw you like that and let it, that why I said sorry. I thought you would crawl into the bedsheet instead you were telling sorry. I said now I am really sorry for not crawling into your bedsheet. She said ok, apology accepted. I got up and kissed

her and said thanks for accepting my apology. I said I will have a bath and come and went and picked a towel and went into the bathroom. I put the clothes I was wearing on the clothes line and turned on the shower. The water hit my body and I felt refreshed. I heard a sound and turned towards the door and Nandini came into the bathroom and closed the door. I said come on we will have a bath together. She said coming and removed her clothes and came into the shower. I pulled her towards me and kissed her. She kissed back and we kissed with our lips and tongue for some time under the running water. Then I turned her from the other side entered her from the back and started to move while catching her boobs with my hands. She moaned with pleasure and I was having a great sex of my lifetime. I don't know why it is always different with her. I always received the greatest pleasure with her. That must be the reason I stayed with her instead of going to a hotel. How much I had sex with her, I am not satisfied fully and wanted another session with her. I feel like she would go away in the next minute from me and I need to satisfy my lifelong pleasures with her. When I am sure that she was satisfied I let her go and completed my bath. She had her bath and came out. By the time I dressed up and sat on the sofa reading the day's newspaper. There is an article in the newspaper that a notorious gangster was caught in the night in a police raid. The information has been provided by an accomplice of his named Dolly. He is referred to as RK, his name being Rakesh Khanna. She was an accomplice of his for a long time and she was running the gang in the front while he sits behind the curtain and runs the show. The police are interrogating both the gangsters and gathering information on their activities and other members of the gang. With the capture of these gangsters the police are confident of solving many cases involving the gang. I called up Kirit and asked him did he read the news article. It seems they have not given much importance to the news as it was caught by Andhra Police. But a small news article placed in the national news page. He said after reading that there is not much information in the article. I read the article in the local newspaper and he was elated with joy. I said now Dolly and her boss are caught, you don't have to be scared of her like the time they took you on your own bike to their hideout and left you there. He said yes, I am happy. I said I gave the police some leads and they did not follow them properly otherwise they could have caught them earlier. Now at last they are caught and your problem is solved. He asked what are you doing in Hyderabad. I said catching Dolly. He asked surprisingly it is you who caught Dolly. I said who else can do that, she not known to anyone here and she boldly went to the party office, I don't know what she has in mind. But when I saw her I called security and police and they arrested and took her into custody. I asked them to check with Nashik police to

verify about her cases against her. That is enough to keep her under custody. It seems when they interrogated her she informed about her boss and he was caught overnight. I think you never met him. He said I never met him and never heard about him. I said inform Mahira, I don't have much time I have to go to the hospital. He said ok bye and cut the call. Mahira is another one who is interested in the news.

Nandini came after dressing and came and sat beside me. She said we will have our breakfast at the hospital. I will order something from the cafeteria. I said no problem. I showed her the news article and she read it and said I think we will have a good traction with Mr. Naidu with this. I said I hope so. They should not feel inconvenienced about the police inquiry into why she came there, etc. She said they should thank us for unmasking the gangster who had come to their party office. What purpose she could have come for? I said their main aim is to cheat people and banks. They must have come with a plan. I think we caught her before she could talk about her plan. He may not even have met her. She might be waiting to get a meeting with him.

I kissed her and said let us go to the hospital. We walked to the hospital and I went to the room allotted to us. I asked the developer what is his name. He said Mohan. I asked Mohan how things are going on. He said except for some problems with the hardware and networking, everything is working fine. And this packet came for you. I looked at the from address it is from Mr. Naidu. He must have sent the data I requested from him. It seems after the police enquiry, he must have felt confident of giving us some work.

I removed the papers and gave them to Mohan and said if you don't have any other work feed this data into this application and showed him how to feed the data. Told him when he finishes to inform me, I will be with Nandini. He said ok and started to feed the data in the application I indicated. It is just for data entry and I have to copy the data into my laptop to verify.

I went in sat with Nandini and opened my laptop. I continued the story. I was looking at her and typing as she entered into my story and I want to describe her and how I felt when I first met her. She lifted her head and asked why are you looking at me rather than the computer. I said I am thinking how beautiful you look and why did I keep you away for so long. She said until that day you visited my room I had no idea about you. At the time you were twice married with children. I always thought of you as just a friend who is helping me. When you told me, you had been in my room and how you felt about me then it occurred you were the person I was waiting to meet again. Then when you said

you don't want to have anything to do with me, I was disappointed. But when you had to go to Delhi after death of Guru, I thought I should accompany you to Delhi and will have another chance to impress you to come together. But we were together and Loveleen hogged the limelight during the period and I did not get to connect with you again. Until that day at Rohan's flat I did not understand what is our connection with each other. I said Rohan told me about your story of 1987 when you have encountered your guardian angel or savior, I did not have any idea of my involvement in that, until you told me about that I am the one who stayed with you that night. Until the other night I had no idea what we have done that night. Nandini asked how do you know what happened that night? I said when I had been with you, I recollected what happened that day. After that we went to the restaurant and again our night with you. Those two times I had felt that I have been transported to 1987 to be with you. I still feel that it was me that night who has kept your company. You told me I came to you that night but I feel I have not been present there but I have been transported there from here from that time we had sex. I felt the same way second time also. But after that I did not feel that way of being transporting to 1987. She said I felt the same the first two times, I felt you had been distant with me but next time you were with me and I felt complete satisfaction. Yes, I also felt the same way with you. I also thought I was in 1987. But how is that possible. I said if Leena can come and go from some other time or dimension anything can be possible. Nandini asked are you sure she went away to the place where she came from? I said when she came over here, I felt a disturbance in my heart, something has happened until I went and brought her back, I was restless. But this time she went missing I did not feel any disturbance and instead I felt a calm like something good happened. She asked now what will happen to us. I said only time will tell.

The phone rang it is Mohan telling me that he had fed the data. I told him to put the data on the server and I will pick it. I checked the server and the data is placed there. I copied the data into my laptop, and then I ran the program processing data. It should take some time for processing. I said I will have a fag and come, came out and lit a fag and stood there thinking. Completing the fag, I came back to Nandini's cabin. She is not there, she must have gone on some errand. I looked at the process running. It is already completed. I have optimized the process and it runs in minutes, I run the report program and checked various combinations and printed them and called the phone number mentioned on the envelope. Mr. Naidu's PA took the phone, I identified myself and asked him to give me a time, I would like to discuss the data sent to me. He told me to come after 4 pm. I said I will be there and cut the call. I sat there

studying the reports until Nandini came with some brunch for us. She said sorry for the delay I ordered from the canteen and they forgot to send it here. So, I went myself and brought it. I said it's ok, and we had our breakfast and she got an attendant to get us tea. I told her we have a meeting at 4 pm. She nodded her head. It seems she is thinking about if I go back to Bombay, what she will do.

I had the tea and made some notes from the reports and put aside the papers. I told her don't worry, I will be coming back to Hyderabad, now we will start our operations here. She asked are you sure? I said to see you at least I will come regularly here, ok. She said happily ok.

Mohan came running to me and said there is a call from Pauleen, she said to expect a call from the Paints company on this number. I said I am coming to his room. I looked at Nandini and asked what is the urgency? I went to his room and sat down on the chair there. The call came after 5 minutes. I lifted the phone and said hello. It is Jathin from the paints company. I asked him what happened. He said there is an emergency in the Madras branch and Mr. Kathuria is not available and his man is there and he could not solve the problem. I tried to call you from the card you gave me and Mr. Kirit gave me your office number. When I called there the receptionist said you are in Hyderabad and gave me this number. I said ok, so what can I do? He said you need to go to Madras immediately and correct the problem, our Chief Accountant said they will reimburse all the expenses for your journey. I said I have a meeting in the evening if I go by tomorrow morning flight will it be ok? He said it is ok, you go to Madras, there is a hotel close to the airport it is named Classic three star hotel. You go there and take a room and our Madras Branch Manager will come and pick you up from there. I said ok, I will catch the morning first flight. Give me a phone no of Madras branch, I will book a ticket and inform them of the flight timings. He said to note down the number and gave me the number, I noted down the number, said bye and cradled the receiver.

I went to Nandini's cabin and told her about the Madras trip. She said it is necessary to take up other's work. I said we are looking for an opening into Madras, it could be this. If we can sell them our factory software, we will have a footing in Madras. I can send our developers, but they don't know the sales. So, it should be me. She said I will also come with you. I said you might get bored there. She said let us stay there for two or three days and see the sights around Madras. I said ok, if you so say, get us two tickets for tomorrow morning. She called their agent and asked them to book two tickets to morning flight to Madras.

When the agent informed about the ticket booking, I rang up madras branch on the number provided by Jathin and informed about our flight timing.

I said let us go to lunch then we will proceed to meet Mr. Naidu.

We were in Mr. Naidu's office by 3:45 pm. We informed his PA of our arrival and sat down on the sofa provided for the visitors. After informing his boss, he came over and sat beside us. He asked how do you know Dolly? I said one of our friends had an encounter with her. She took him to Nashik to open a factory. When the machinery arrived and installed, they went to a bank for a loan and they put the factory as collateral. The mistake they did is instead of signing the application in their own name, they signed as my friend. Now the bank people smelled something wrong, maybe because it did not match with the ownership of the company. So, they complained to the police, they took my friend to the police station. When I went there with a lawyer, the police could not produce any evidence of his involvement, I brought him back to Bombay and went back again. I enquired with the bank and we have taken legal action against the bank for complaining about my friend instead of the owners of the company. Then when I went to Dolly who is in charge of the factory, our friend who has taken him there helped me understand the situation and I brought her back with me to Bombay in the middle of the night, so she escaped from Dolly and Dolly went into hiding. Now their modus operandi is to set up a factory make small payments to the machinery vendors and then take a loan on the machinery, later strip the factory of the machinery, send it back to the vendors, and disappear with the bank loan. This way they have cheated many banks in many cities. This is the first time they were stopped by the police. He had a second encounter with her when he was going on his bike to his factory and there was a robbery going on in the middle of the road. Apparently, one of the robbers had recognized him and took him to their hideout at a gunpoint. Seeing him brought by her men, they have vacated the building and went back into hiding. This was the time she was back from hiding. I think you have an idea what she has come for. He said he had no idea for what she came. I was with Mr. Naidu when she came in and my assistant told her to wait and then you have called the security and policemen. I said what a luck, if she had at least talked with you we would have known what is her new operations. Now it will only be known to the police. I have read her boss was also caught last night. He said yes, I have also read about it. Did you know she had a boss? I said we have assumed she was the boss, we never knew there was another man behind her. He looked at the time and knocked on the door and went inside. It must be some kind of code for them. The time for the person in there to complete the meeting. A man who

looked every inch a politician exited the room and his PA came and told me to come. We entered the room and sat before him. He said so, what conclusion you have come to. I showed him one report and said if you go to elections on your own, this is the likely outcome. And showed him another report and said if you go with this party this would be the outcome and with another party this would be the outcome. As you have indicated your intention to contest the polls with this party and if you give them these constituencies only then your chances of winning more seats for yourself will increase and they will also win at least these number of seats, showing them the reports. He asked did the reports were outcome of the data you received. I said absolutely and also, I have put my inputs into that when processing the data. I have analysed with present scenario. If before the elections some thing changes we can put that scenario and see what could be outcome. Looking at all the reports he said excellent work. How did you do that? I said I had created a software program, I feed the data and give some variables and process the data, it will generate these reports. From that I choose what is best for the party and again run the reports, these are the outcomes. Do you think if we go with this party our chances of winning increases? I said I am sure, we can also give them these seats in seats sharing, where we have a lesser chance of winning, we can have ourselves have more number of seats in the assembly. He said I have to see if they will accept these seats. I said they are likely accepting them as they seem strong in those seats, I am seeing your party's weakness in those seats to give them those. He said it seems an excellent idea for seat sharing. I will discuss these with our leadership and other members of the party. I don't see why they should not accept these recommendations. Shall I reveal your name to them? I said if is between you and me it would be better. He said what are you expecting from us for doing all this. I said I am not expecting any political favours from you, like asking you to give me a government project or something like that. I want you to give software projects from your own enterprises. Like factories you own or hospitals you manage. This way it will be winning for both of us. You can increase your profitability to your operations by cutting costs. We will have our software run at multiple companies, which will be our advertisement. We will have standing space in this state. He said I agree with you and I will check with our companies and tell them to approach you. I said Nandini will be our contact person in Hyderabad. We already have a developer working from here. He will be able to install and train your people. We have a hardware company based in Bombay, but we can deliver throughout India. He took the cards and said I will certainly come back to you on this. I said tomorrow I will be in Madras then I will return to Bombay. You can contact our office for further information. He said I

will certainly do that. Got up shook our hands and we came out of the room and thanked his PA and went back to the hospital. After sitting in the car, Nandini asked will he give us software contracts? I said it will be win, win situation for him. He will have our continuous support in elections and he did not have to commit anything to us. It is just software projects from his companies.

We reached the hospital and went and sat in the Nandini's cabin. I asked her my work for today is finished, what are your plans. She said now it is 6 pm, shall we go to any movie. I said it is up to you, I don't know about any new movies. She said let us go to the theatre and see. I said I am game. She got up and I followed her into the parking. She took me to a theater complex, there Bhairava Dweepam is playing. She asked shall we go to this movie? I said it is okay, I have not watched any Telugu movies recently. We took the tickets and went in sat in the theater. We watched and we came out the theater. She said we will have dinner and go back to the flat. I said it is ok with me. We went and had dinner and returned to Rohan's flat. I enquired her about the other flats. She said they will be ready in two months. These people are getting requests to complete their flats first. I said it is okay with me. I want to have our own flat next time I visit Hyderabad. She said I will check with them. We entered the flat and I sat down on the sofa, Nandini said she will change and come. She went into the second bedroom and changed into a negligee and came. I whistled and said you look damn sexy in that. She asked do you think so? I showed by sign and kissed in the air. She came and sat on my lap and kissed me and I reciprocated her kiss. We kissed with lips, tongues and some. I came down to her neck and kissed her on the neck. She arched back. I kissed on the bridge of her breasts. Then on top of her breasts. A moan escaped from her. I reached to her back and released the clasp of her bra, then lifted the bra and kissed her on the breasts one by one and then pressed on the nipples with my mouth. She got up from my lap and I stood up with her. I hugged her and kissed her. We went to the bedroom and continued our action there. I laid her on the bed and removed her negligee. Then removed her bra and sat beside her on the bed. I milked her breast and kissed her on the breast and came down to her navel, kissing her I moved her panties down and then removed them. I kissed her on the vagina and sat between her legs. I parted her legs and started to use my tongue on her pussy. Then I started to go up to her breasts and started to kiss each of the breasts. Then I entered her and started to move rhythmically until she is satisfied. Then I lay beside her.

I put on the alarm to get up to go to the airport. Then slept.

we got up and readied and we went to the airport in her car. We parked the car and went and took the boarding pass, went through the security check and sat down at the boarding gate. When the boarding started we went and sat down on our seats. We reached Madras in one hour and we took an auto and reached the hotel. We went and took a room and went and sat down in our room. After half an hour, we got a call from the reception and we went down. I went to the reception was about to give the keys, I saw the name on the dress of the receptionist it is Latha. I asked are you from Bombay. She said yes, how do you know. I said so you must be knowing Sunitha? She said yes, she is my sister. I said I am Kumar, she is a partner in our firm. She said oh, you are Mr. Kumar. I think someone is waiting for you outside, we will speak later. I came out and the branch manager is waiting with his scooter. I said please tell the auto person where we should go, we will come behind you. Seeing Nandini he said I thought you will come alone. Otherwise, I would have called our office car. I said no problem, we will come in an auto, I know cabs will be difficult to get here. Their factory is in Porur and he stopped at the gate and our auto stopped behind him. We got down and paid what he fixed with the driver and we entered through the gate and he took us to the computer room. There is a developer from Kathuria's and he said there is an error in the software and I could not understand the problem and Kathuria is in the USA for a software order. I don't know what to do and they said they will send someone from Bombay. I asked him to show the problem. He showed the problem and I asked him to show the code. I looked at the code and the error is coming from a subroutine and that is why he could not find the error. I debugged the code and found the error and corrected it and run the program and the error went away. I said for this small thing I had to come from Hyderabad. The branch manager called me to meet their director who is in charge of the Madras branch. He asked me what is the problem. I said there is a small problem with a subroutine that caused the error. He must have thought I was from Kathuria's firm, he started blasting me, how this can happen and things like that. I patiently heard him and said if your company had got the software from us, you would not have faced the problem. He was taken aback by my words, he asked your company did not supply this software? I said we are a different company and I came to Hyderabad to install the hospital software and to meet with a political party for supporting them in the coming elections. I gave him my card and said we have just supplied to Godrej with the latest updates for the new central excise system. He asked how did you update the latest central excise rules so fast? I said we have some political background and we got information about the excise rules more than a month back and we have our software ready before even it has been declared in

the budget. He asked can you get us the software for us? I said if you order I can install it before the day's end. He called his brother in Bombay and confirmed to get the software. He said you give the price and you can install the software. We gave a price for their branch and he agreed as it is cheaper than the maintenance charges. I could give it at a cheaper price as we don't have to spend any more on development, my main aim is to get their order. I opened the laptop copied the data structures and I copied the existent data to the new data, it took me two hours and the new software is ready for their use. I told them to test and check. They ran the program and it is compatible with the new rules. I said if they install a modem in their system, they can get the updates or we are collaborating with the courier company for deliveries of updates if they change any rules by the government in the meanwhile. The director has handed me a cheque for the supply of the software and we came out and the branch manager has arranged a car for our return to the hotel. On the way, we stopped at the airport, and purchased return tickets for the late-night flight.

After coming back to the hotel Nandini asked why did you give the software so cheap? I said we need to have a standing point here, also we can get their head office orders now.

We went to the reception to pick up the keys. Seeing Latha as we did not get to speak with her in the morning, I struck a conversation with her. I asked her how is your husband, I think he is Shrikant, yes. I asked her why don't you visit us when visiting your parents. She said we have not been to Bombay for quite some time, we will see. I asked her so how long were you married? She said nine years. I said wow, nine years and children. She said one boy and one daughter. I said it's nice and indicating Nandini, I said she is Nandini our business partner from Hyderabad. I was in Hyderabad to install software for a Hospital. Then I got a call to come here on an emergency. I am thinking about sending Sunitha here for some time for setting up a branch, can she stay at your place. She said yes, she can stay with us. I said I don't want her to stay in any hotel, that's why I am asking. She said certainly, we don't have any problem, we have a guest room where she can sleep. I said thanks. She must have cooled down with my concern for Sunitha. She said Sunitha told me you saved her from the Bomb blast at the Air India building. I said I also saved myself. I had taken her to attend the disciplinary hearing, then when we are about to enter the building, I felt some bad omens and instead of going in I took a U-turn and we hardly went three kilometers we heard the bomb blast and we stopped the car and came out and looked towards the building. Black smoke was bellowing from the building. From that time, she could not get back on the job due to the files

lost at the building. So, I put her as the Operations Director and gave her two divisions of marketing also. She said she is refusing to marry, she is not giving any reason. I said I also told her many times, to marry someone. If you don't find someone to your liking, you should marry someone your parents fix for you. But she is struck somewhere I don't feel comfortable marrying someone I don't know anything about, things like that. With those words, she started trusting me and started to speak freely. She told us to sit on a sofa and started to talk freely with us. She asked about our businesses and what are our future plans, must be because I told her I will send Sunitha to Madras for opening a branch. Then about my family. Then I asked about my uncle who stays near her house. I said we have to return to Hyderabad and then to Bombay. Otherwise, I would have visited our relatives. We have lots of relatives here. We told her to prepare a bill and we will be leaving on the evening flight. She said the bill will be cleared by the branch manager, he has spoken with our manager. I said we will take some rest and then start for the airport. I said seeing you and went to our rooms. We started where we left off in the night. I don't know why we could not get enough of each other. It might be the thought that we may not meet for a long time, playing in my mind or the thought that she may go away from me. Having spent I rolled over from her and lay on the side. The door bell rang and I asked her go to the bathroom and I took a towel and splashed a little water on my face and body and went and opened the door. A room boy was standing out. I asked him what? He said do you want some tea sir. I said yes. He brought two cups and a tea pot and put it on the table. I said thanks and he went away. I went in to the bathroom and Nandini is having a bath and I joined her.

We dressed and came to the reception with our laptop bag and another handbag, signed out and said bye, seeing you to Latha, we caught a rickshaw and went to the airport to return to Hyderabad.

We reached Hyderabad picked the car from the parking and reached Rohan's flat. I asked Nandini how long is Rohan's medical conference? Nandini replied he has already returned, but he is staying with his parents for us to get some free time. I asked did he know about us? She replied yes, he could not say anything because you were my guardian angel, I knew for a long time. I could not say anything to that.

I have changed and lay on the bed thinking how my life is turning this way. What I was and what I have come up to. At one time I don't have five rupees to spare for going with Sneha, now I am flying left, center and middle. We have four bungalows and big office premises and a bungalow for house. Now here we are planning for a big office downstairs and another flat side by to this flat, and a

plot of land near Nandini's house. We are planning to start branches all over India. Did I ever dreamt I could do all this in my lifetime? I did not really think what I would do and had no dream jobs, never thought to become someone rich. At one time I was pining for buying a house for Sneha, a small house, for that I did work day and night and saved like a miser. I could not give Sneha any luxuries, forget about luxuries, I could not give her small comforts. She went away listening to Suresh and I became someone else. Forget about saving, I started to splurge the money for Sahithi's comforts and luxuries. I saved for Sneha and Sahithi was the one who could enjoy them. Sneha after returning could only enjoy for a brief period but she must be having a feeling that she was staying in Sahithi's house. I am not clear about who is responsible for her death, is it her grandfather who send her money through a murderer, or am I responsible to take her and putting her in the hotel to help them out. Or is it Sahithi, who picked a fight with her on a trivial matter? Or Sneha herself who demanded to be taken away from the house, or is it fate who brought all these circumstances together?

After changing Nandini came and lay beside me and put her head on my hand and her hand on my chest. I turned my head towards her and she looked into my eyes and said I could not live without you. I said you have to, I am not a marrying material for you. What will your parents think, Rahul for the time being leave it as it is, but he will not let you spoil your future being with me. He wants you to marry a suitable groom, who is selected by your parents. Or do you want me to look for one for you, we have software and the groom's data is available from all over India. She asked do you have their data? I said I might have some outdated data, two to three days old. I had updated the data before coming here. She said let us look at some grooms from your data. I said ok, I will get the laptop. I opened the application and asked her what is the main search criteria. She said it should be male. I said obviously it will be male only. Do you want to check with your caste? She said ok, check it for my father's satisfaction. I selected the caste from the list. Next do you want some age range. She said below 30. I selected the age range 25-30. If he is lower than her age, we will ignore him. She said that's ok check now. I clicked search. We went through some profiles and I said look at this he is 29 and he is from a businessman family. How does he look? She said he may not look as his photo. We went through some more and came back to the one I showed her. I said let us check him out. Let us see what is his business address and see what he does, and what he looks like. She said let us go tomorrow and we noted down his address and number.

After 10 am, I called the number asked for Mr. Prathap. They said he must be at his office. I asked for his office number. I noted down the phone no and asked for the address and noted down that too. I called his office number and asked for a meeting with Mr. Prathap. The receptionist asked the reason for the appointment. I said it is for business. She consulted his diary and gave us 2 pm. I told Nandini about the time we got an appointment. She said she will get ready for the meeting. I called our contact in courier company at Hyderabad and asked about their company. He gave some information about the company. Armed with the information we went to his company at around 2 pm. I went and gave my card to the receptionist and told her I have a 2 pm appointment. She consulted his diary and said please be seated he is with another client. We sat down on a sofa there. We looked around the outer office, I thought if the interior decoration was given to our company, we could have done a better job. She must have rung him up, he has sent the client and we were called in. We entered and I gave my card which mentions all the businesses we run. He looked at the card and said please be seated. He asked what can I do for you? I said we are providing multiple services and Matrimony is one of them. He said I am aware, it was my uncle who has registered in the company. I said we have developed the software and with collaboration with the courier company we are running the company. What is your experience with the service. He said he had not received any matches. I opened my laptop and opened his profile and looked at it. I asked him what he expects from his future wife, a house wife or working wife or business woman. He said business women would be better and next choice would be working woman. I asked him many questions based on his profile and finally asked Nandini if you would like to ask any questions? I told him she is Nandini, she is Operations Manager with a hospital, she is also our head of operations for Hyderabad. She asked her questions. Then finally I asked him if she is a match for your profile, if he would like to ask any questions. He must have taken by her looks and attitude. He must be thinking if she is a match for him, it would be good. He asked her what she has studied and what else she has done and what are her hobbies, where she stays. He seemed to be impressed by her profile and asked please get me a bride like her. I asked him if she is your match, do you have any objection. He was silent for a moment and asked you not joking with me? I said no, we checked your profile and we want to know you, so we came over. We will ask her family to contact your family, if you don't have any objection. He said he don't have any objection and gave their details. I said I will take a time from them and ask them visit his family or their family can visit her family. He said I think it is customary to visit the bride's house by the groom's family. I said I will do that. I said so our personal business

concludes. How about business matters. We are providing many services. Software, Hardware, Interior decoration services. We are planning on opening our offices here in Hyderabad. If you have any requirements contact us. We shook hands and came out.

I asked her how did it go? She said I had fun doing that. You must have seen his face when you asked him that do you have any objection if she is your match? He was speechless for a minute. I said he must be praying you to be the bride.

We went over to the hospital and I went to our room and checked in with Mohan. He said there are no problems. Then I went over to Nandini's cabin and sat down and opened my laptop. I called Mr. Subba Rao and passed information about Prathap and consult them about their daughter's alliance. They were happy at last she agreed to the marriage. Next, I went to Rohan's cabin and I was informed he was in surgery, I told them to tell him Kumar came to see him. I came back and sat down and started working.

Nandini came and sat on her chair. I asked her to get me a ticket to Bombay. She pleaded with me to stay for another day. I said as Rohan is back, he might wanted to come back to his flat. She said then let us go to a hotel and stay the night, I will get you a ticket for tomorrow morning. I thought as she will be married soon, she may want a final night with me. I said then book a ticket for me and show me that. She called the travel agent to book a ticket for the first flight to Bombay and deliver the ticket to her immediately. Within half an hour the ticket is in my hands. She said are you happy now, come let us go for lunch. We went to a nearby restaurant for lunch. After coming back, I continued to work with the story. Around 3:30 she sent me tea. At 4 pm she came over and sat in her seat. I asked her shall I go and get my bag from Rohan's flat. Then we can go and stay at a hotel near the airport. She gave me keys and said you can go and get them. I took the keys and went to Rohan's flat. I looked at the side flat where work is going on. It seems the tiles work completed, they are working on cupboards. I opened Rohan's flat and went and packed my things and came back to the hospital and handed her the keys. She went out, must be to return the keys.

I sat there thinking how sad she is looking as I am going back to Bombay. I have to be considerate for her sake, if I stay back she will never agree to marry, I have to keep her away for her sake. I got up and went over to Rohan's cabin. I told him how we went and checked the groom and she has agreed for her parents to go and speak with them. He said his uncle already told him about that. And thanked me for making her agree to the marriage. I said now the ball is in your

court, you have to make her marry per your choice. I am going back to Bombay now my work here is completed. We will return once the office space and flat are ready. We shook hands and came back to Nandini's office. I closed the program and closed the system and packed my laptop bag ready to go to the hotel.

Nandini took us to a hotel near the airport and we took a room and went to our room. When the bell boy brought my luggage, I gave him a tip and he went away. I asked her what will we do about the dinner. She said we will go out and have it, I know a good restaurant nearby. We went to the restaurant had some drinks and dinner and returned back to the hotel. It seems it is going to be our last night together. We spend the night appropriate for the occasion and slept off. I got up and readied and woke Nandini up, I want to say good bye to you. She said I will come with you to drop you off then go back home. I said then come fast. She went and washed her face dressed and came. We settled the bill and by car we went to the airport, she kissed me good bye and I went inside the airport flew back to Bombay.

I picked a cab and reached home. I put the luggage in my room and went over to the office. I called Mr. Naidu's PA and told him that I am back at Bombay, he can contact me at my office number anytime. Normally that number would be transferred to home when Pauleen goes home. That is one advantage of having office and home nearby.

Sunitha

He was just been to Hyderabad twice and now he is planning to go to Delhi. There is an order for software, he wanted to install himself. That is not a matter of concern, but why he is taking Loveleen with him to Delhi? Last time he went with her to Hyderabad, Now Delhi, next to where? He is a changed man after returning from Hyderabad. The first time he returned one kind of a person, the second time he was different. It felt like he had shed his inhibitions there in Hyderabad. He would flirt with everyone, even with Joy he would have a word. He would not care if Sahithi is present there or not. He is like he wants to impress everyone with his antics. Where he was a private person then, now he would call everyone and tell them something and would ask their opinions about the subject and would nod or say something in return. I hardly saw him previously interacting with people except for work, now he would have a word for everyone. Earlier he would tell the watchman not to salute, now he would wait for him to salute and have a word with him and go, why the sudden change in him? It seems like one Kumar went to Hyderabad and another Kumar

returned from there. He said he went in between to Madras and completed another order and came and he handed the cheque for the order. Like with Leena, one Kumar went over and another Kumar came? I have to see his interactions with me.

Kumar

1st of May 1994

I received a call from the PA of Mr. Naidu and he told me the party had a meeting and they decided to go alone in the next elections. I said give me a day I would get the data for the scenario. Any changes in the political scenario. He said there is none. I said I will send them my observations by evening courier.

I looked at the day's work. I had elevated Pauleen to the post of my PA and we selected another girl to man telephones. Except for the VIP's phones, she would attend the phones and appointments. In the meantime, we got the hospital project where Nandini was following up in Bombay. We have employed three more developers and we sent two of them for the implementation of the hospital software. With the software, we also got the hardware business. Me and Loveleen with Mahira decided we have to increase our Dealership for hardware to more manufacturers. We want the clients to have more choice in pricing.

With the experience with marketing to the Godrej, Sunitha got confidence and she has taken two more salesmen for software selling, she gave them one week of training for selling software. Even visited their clients when they could not close the deal with them. Using her beauty and brains she could close two of the deals with the new clients. With renewed confidence, she even told them to identify potential clients and she will close the deals with them.

Mahira is fully busy with the shootings going on in the bungalows. There is a pending orders for the other two shootings with her.

On the occasion of the workers' day, I called for a party and called the workers of the factory for the party at our office backyard. I wanted to thank them for the support they have provided to me and to Kirit.

As it was a holiday my family came to visit us to have some quality time with the kids. Now the kids miss Leena but I told them she went back to her mom.

Still, Sahithi and Sunitha keep their relationship professional and don't talk much to each other. It seems Sahithi still suspects we are having an affair.

I opened Laptop and fed the new parameters and processed the data. By the time the data was processed, I went out to the compound and a fag and returned. While smoking I went to the watchman and chatted with him to know his background and to find he is trustworthy or not. It seems these watchmen are employed by a single company. They provide two men for day and night. They don't normally change them unless one has left the employ or can no longer work. This way the watchman knows the routine of the people who live in those houses. Another thing is they need is a familiar face when going and coming. It is slightly different with bigger societies like where Kirit stays. So, the last time I saw the changes in the watchman, because they were not available and a substitute provided. Sometimes these substitutes continue to work.

I came back printed the report and attached my comments on them, put them in an envelope and addressed it handed it to Ramu to deliver it to the courier company, so it will reach them on Monday morning there.

Loveleen and I are planning a trip to Madras, to look for properties to set up our branch. For the purpose of brevity, we planned to have our branches combined for the three of the companies. We have to put a head at each of the branches. We are thinking of having these branches under a new company for working process, nothing is fixed yet. Using the sale of software to the Madras branch we got the order from the Bombay branch which we completed, and for Delhi and Noida we got the order and have yet to install it. We have not thought of a branch in Delhi but we are going to have an office there. I thought the flat we used for our operation can be used for the offices for the time being. So, with lots of success in the last month, we are having the party in the evening.

As usual, Krishna is the organizer for our parties and I told him not to spare anything for the factory workers. I don't want them to complain that they are discriminated from the VIPs in serving. If you want you can arrange it in front and back or at different timings. I left the rest to him.

It is around 8 pm, I sat on a chair with a glass in my hand and saw a drama being unfolded in front of my eyes. Nishitha went to the bar to pick up a glass for her father who is in deep discussion with the Purchase Manager of Godrej. My brother Ram stood a little behind her to order something. She picked the glass and turned suddenly as her pallu caught on her chappal, she dropped the glass and was about to fall forward. As she turned over, Ram in front of her and he caught the glass in one hand and Nishitha in another. That is a sight to watch, maybe these kinds of things only happen in the movies. I don't know then the scene was caught by the film crew working in the next building in a fluke

incident. They were checking Nishitha's movement on the camera, probably they were thinking of offering her a role in their picture. I put aside my glass and went over to them. It seems while catching her he must have touched her in a sensitive place. She nervously ran over to the office building. I went behind her to check if she is injured or something. She said to me I want to marry your brother. I said I don't know if he would like to ever marry. I heard a sound and turned and Ram is standing at the door looking at us, he must have stunned hearing Nishitha. Maybe no other girl told him those words. He came slowly towards her as if walking on coals. He came and took her hand in his hand and asked will you marry me? She said in a theatrical way yes, yes, yes. The film crew came running behind Ram and filmed the whole thing, but not necessarily from a good angle.

I caught both of them in each hand and brought them to Mr. Patel's side. He was looking at me why I have these two people on each of my hands. The film director started to clap from behind. Then understanding the situation, other people started to clap, some people clapped unknowingly. So, in between the clapping, I brought them and stood before Mr. Patel and asked do you give your daughter Nishitha's hand in marriage to my brother Ram. Hearing my words others started to shout Nishitha, Ram, Nishitha, Ram in a dramatic manner. The film crew focused their camera on Mr. Patel. He asked what does your brother do? I said is being my brother is not sufficient? With the background chanting and in a cinematic way he got up and took their right hands and put one, on the other hand, said yes, I agree to your marriage if both of your Kundali match. Nishitha said you don't leave your Kundali here also. Hearing the commotion my parents came over. My mother asked what happened? I said you were asking for a long time, now your dreams have been fulfilled. You are going to perform your son's marriage that too leisurely, not in a hurried manner like ours. My mother hugged and kissed her on the forehead and said at last I found a daughter in law.

I said to the cameraman you have to give us a copy, I think you want to use it for reference. The director came and asked Mr. Patel I would like to offer your daughter a role in a movie for the hero's sister and we want to use the same scene in our movie.

I said it is time for breaking champagne. With the festivities all around we concluded the day's party.

The next day I called Nishitha and Ram to my room. I told Nishitha and Ram to work together to create a division in their interior decorating for Electronics

usage and to provide acoustics to improve their home theatre environment. I asked her to work with Ram to think about ways to improve that part of the business. I want to provide services; no other company provides. Ram said he will help Nishitha with her work. I thought now they will work together, they could come close, which was lacking with Nishitha and Kirit.

I let them go away and asked mom about fixing a date for marriage. If they can give a date I will have one of the bungalows available for marriage. If for those dates any of the two bungalows are not available we have to think about using our office and house properties for the wedding. She said they will consult with Patel about the dates, he is adamant about checking their Kundali. I said let him check it, it is written in their fate so no one can change that.

I went to Loveleen about installing the software at Delhi and Noida.

She said she will come with me but would like to go on the train instead of a flight. I asked what about Dhruv, she said we will come back within a week, so she would like to keep him here. I said fine by me.

I said I will arrange the train tickets and came back to my office. I called out the travel agent and asked him to book a first-class coupe in Rajdhani express. I got a call that the tickets are booked for after three days. Later on, we received the tickets at the office, Pauleen signed for them and collected them.

Dhruv is mixing well with Atul and Reena and would not like to be taken away from them. He wants to go to school with them. Chitti had to take him with them to the school and bring him back. So, he would not mind staying back in Bombay. I felt after coming to live here he might be going further from Loveleen, but then it would facilitate her to return to work. I am thinking she could be sent to either Hyderabad or Madras as Head of the Branch. In Hyderabad, there is an office space and in the same building, there is a three-bedroom flat for her to stay. If Manisha and Ram together go there and look after the branch, I can also send them there. Then Sahithi would require an Assistant. We have to look for more top management material candidates, who would be trustworthy candidates. Is this the problem faced by big companies? They have VPs, AVPs, then managers and staff. I have seen the courier company had VP and AVP boards outside their cabins and they have secretaries sitting outside their cabins. I think they have gone international so, they have designations like VP and AVP. Indian companies have Chairman, General Manager, Dy.GM, like these designations. We also have to think about future top management requirements. Once I thought are we becoming top management heavy. It is a requirement for our company structure. We can

manage with one or two members of developers in the branches. Most of the development can be done in Bombay, or in Hyderabad if we shift our development centre there. If my vision is correct, Hyderabad would become one of the software hubs of India under Mr. Naidu's leadership. I hope they would win the elections. That is the reason I am ready to invest in Hyderabad. Loveleen follows the way I manage the company affairs and her finances too. She must be having trust in my judgement. Now Guru's finances must be available for her to invest. I never asked her about how much she has for investment. Now her father is the CM and he must be allowing his black money to be invested with our company. That could be another reason for her not resisting my investment advice. Even if I invest in the company's name it will be her capital investment. If the investment fails what would be her loss a few thousand rupees. As we are only investing in Real Estate. Hyderabad is an upcoming city, it is expanding exponentially. The space is not constrained like Bombay which is an Island. Here the property values go up. But in Hyderabad people starting to lap up properties being developed. Take for example Mr. Subba Rao, he is from Guntur and he had invested in Hyderabad in a hospital and I think the building we brought the office space and flat were their development only. They may be developing many properties around Hyderabad. They must be having an Idea how the city will expand. That could be the reason he was asking about who will win the next elections and how it will affect their investments. It might be working like this, they will build a complex with their own money or borrowed money. Then when they sell of the property they will invest the money in developing another property, this should be going on like this. But our business model is quite different. We develop software for a company, let us take hospital software. Our costs are recovered from the installation of the first hospital and we would have substantial profits from that. Then when we install at the next hospital, what would be our costs minimal only a developer had to be assigned to implement the software. Then the cost would be further reduced with the developer getting more experienced with installation and time to run will decrease and no further developmental costs need to be borne by the company. Same thing will apply to the manufacturing company's software. So, with lower costs, we can maintain our branches also. In all this who will be getting more clients, it is our kid's firm, each place we sell our software, we would have orders for hardware. I think it is my brilliant idea to start supplying hardware also. If the last year's accounts are finalized we can expect a good profit from the company with minimal staff. Selling is done by our firm, only person running the company is Mahira as MD. She is happy with the designation and even though I took her out of our selling team, she does not have anything to

complain about, now she is an MD of a company, that should be her incentive rather than I am lowering her grade she might have thought at the beginning. Can I shift her to one of the branches and make her the head of the branch? I think I can certainly do that.

About Loveleen investing in properties let her exhaust her finances, she should say I don't have any more money to invest. Then there is Madras, the area around the airport is pretty empty, that is one part of the city that is going to be an investment opportunity. It will be the next Begumpet of Madras in the next five years. Then Bangalore, I heard the software is going to be the rage in the next few years there. If what I think is correct the software industry is going to rule the country. Where ever the state government encourages setting up companies or development centres, the companies will take the opportunities there. Now Bombay is pretty crammed up with businesses, they need to go out of the city, probably suburbs will start seeing more growth. Now the city costs are going up and I hear people start to live beyond Borivali. I heard from someone Suri's family brought a flat at Mira Road and went to live there, and that too long back. That's why I did not see him again when I went to Vakola. Now Kirit got a marriage proposal from Mira Road. Even though he had shifted from Andheri to Dadar, his father must have done some good investments to buy flats there. I don't think we need any more investment in Bombay. We better think about investments in the south. North India investments can be done if any, only if Loveleen or her father would take care of them. The flat we were using is enough for our use there. If we ask they may discreetly get us some orders for hospital software or factory software. I have to speak with Loveleen about that. I was thinking about why I have not connected to Loveleen physically even though I have connected to her emotionally. I think for everything there would be a time. Like with Nandini, how much I want to avoid her, I could not do that. The funny part of it was that I was transported to 1987 with her. Why did I do that? Did I have to connect then and due to my marriage with Sneha I could not connect with her? Did Sneha save me from heartbreak then, but she herself did break my heart around that time. Has it been written in my fate that I should get a heartbreak then? Really where is written, some say in our foreheads, some say it is written in our hands. Some say we come down prewritten, that means our soul has the blue print for our lives. If everything is prewritten, what is the meaning of our existence. Some say how we act in our lives has some influence on that. I think it is called Karma Sidhantham, the Science of Karma. Like if we do good deeds and it will affect our next birth. Do we need to do good karma in this life to get another life? How it is carried form birth to birth. If we are suffering means we have done some bad karma in the

previous birth. Did I hurt someone in the previous birth, so I had to endure all this in this birth? I don't think so. I think I have to rethink this whole science of karma, the soul and rebirth theories, that will be for another time.

After coming back from Delhi, I have to arrange for the marriage of my brother. Now I have to arrange for a better room for them at the house. I got up and went over to the house to look at the available rooms. I checked with Chitti, she is in the Kitchen preparing lunch with the help of a cook. The cook must have come from Loveleen's staff. I called her out, she handed her work to the cook and came out asked what is it, Anna? I said now Ram and Nishitha are getting married, we have to provide them a better room at our house. What rooms are available? She said I think you will have some big rooms in the first floor. I said is there a connected room there. She showed me a room it has attached bathroom and there is a room connected through a door. I thought this room is ideal for them. I said when Nishitha comes in the evening, show her this room and ask her will it be ok for them? She nodded her head. I asked her do you need a separate room for you? She said I don't need a separate room now, as Leena went away and I am staying with Reena. When Reena asks for separate room, then I will think about it. I said by that time you will be married. She looked at the floor with shyness. I said don't be shy in front of your brother, if you have anyone in mind tell me. She kept her gaze on the floor and said no one anna. I said carry on your work and went to the library on the same floor.

I got a taste of what is in her mind in the evening when Ramu came to me when I lit a fag, and said can I ask something, sir? I said did I ever stop anyone from speaking their mind? Took a puff and released the smoke. He hesitated and I concentrated on my smoking, to let him speak his mind. Then he said I like Chitti and I would like to marry her. I asked him why do you want to marry her? He said she is an excellent cook and she looks after the kids. I thought he is asking for her hand not because he loves her but she can work and run his house. I kept smoking and did not answer him. He must have waited for me to burst out in anger, he does not know I am not that kind of a person, I take things coolly. He must have felt he does not have a chance with Chitti, he said it was not my words but Krishna's. He told me after the party, he wants to marry her as he loves her very much. He was scared to come to you as he thinks she is your cousin and he thinks you might get angry if he asks you for her hand. I said I think he does not know me enough, I will speak with him. He went away. If I marry her off at this juncture, I could not send her away with him, he had to come and live with her here, would he do that? Until Dhruv can manage himself and unlike Atul in the present, he needs constant supervision, otherwise, our

plans for expansion would hit breaks. First, I have to speak with Chitti what he feels about Krishna. Then I will think about their marriage. What is her age, is she 18 yet?

I went back to my room and continued with my work.

I completed my work for today and went over to Sunitha's room. She said she would take another half an hour and tell Nishitha to wait for her to come. I said I will do that, and came out and lit a fag walked to the house. Sometimes if the shooting is going on, we had to go outside to reach our house. It seems they are on a break and some touch up going on and I went to the director and asked how long will it take to get our party shoot. He said it may take one week. I went over to the next building. They must have packed for the day and except for the workers packing their stuff, and no shooting is going on. I moved to the house and entered the house. It seems Sahithi and Nishitha have not returned from their offices.

I went over to the children's room and found Nikita sitting with the children. I asked her where is Chitti, she said she must have gone to do some shopping. I said ok. Do you want to continue to help with the children? She said no, I want to do something, other than look after the kids. I said then when I told you to come and meet me after the exams, why you did not come? She said she is waiting to get her results. I said did I ask to see your marks list? Come and meet me tomorrow morning. I need people who are trust worthy and I need to train the people I know and can trust.

I went and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv watching news.

I saw Chitti and Ramu bringing the groceries she held some bags and Ramu held heavy bags in his hand they came in laughing at some joke. Seeing they stopped their laugh and went inside the kitchen. When Ramu went away, I called Chitti and asked her opinion of Ramu. She said he is her Rakhi brother. I said then what is her opinion about Krishna. She said he is ok. I said I think he likes you but if you marry and go away what will we do here? I want Dhruv to be little older and going to school. She said he is ready to come and stay with us at this house. So, both of them have already discussed about this and he had taken a decision to come and stay with us. If he is thinking of coming and staying with us, we have to think about absorbing him with one of our companies. I have to discuss with Kirit and others about it. I will look into this after coming back from Delhi.

I saw Nishitha and Sahithi enter the house. I gave Nishitha the message from Sunitha to wait until she gives the daily leads report. And then spoke with Sahithi regarding Chitti and Krishna's matter. I said I am thinking of offering a security position to Krishna and he would also look after the maintenance of the two bungalows we are giving for rent, it will also help out with Mahira.

Sunitha came over and handed Nishitha her leads. I asked Nishitha are there any anyone in your company who can be elevated to your position or you can provide another assistant to Sahithi. She asked why? I said I wanted to move our directors around and see how that will work out. For example, you and Ram can go over to Hyderabad for some time and he knows the local language also. Or I send Sunitha to Madras, I have already talked to her sister and she can stay there for a month or two until she sets up the branch and return. Then your sales leads have to be handed over by someone else here. We need more people to take charge of the branches until they are up and running, then we can manage from here. Sahithi doesn't want to go anywhere and she is needed here to look after the firm. So, I am looking at other options who can look after others' work until they return, think it over and let me know. Maybe I can ask Pauleen to check the leads of the firm until Sunitha can return. Joy was asking for a shift to some other place, can I put her there and can she manage from there? I need to take decisions from time to time on these matters. Let us complete our Delhi trip. Then I will take some decisions on these matters.

She went over to her house and I headed to the library to complete my book. I spoke to the paints company and they asked me to stay near their factory in Noida. There is Nirula's hotel close by. I told them to book a double room us for there.

Next day we caught the Rajdhani express and left for Delhi. When I sat on the train and Loveleen came behind me and sat on the coupe. I felt a déjà vu that I had taken this journey many times. We sat down on the seat and train started to roll.

We started to chat about the politics I am working on and then about business. I told her what to do under what circumstances. I wanted her to take over the business, as she is the main Shareholder. Then about handling other shareholders or directors. I have been talking for possibly for three hours and she was listening attentively and asked questions in between.

There is a knock on the door and I got up and opened the door. It is train attender who had brought the dinner. I took them and put them on the table. We completed the dinner and I placed the tray outside and locked the door and

now no one will disturb us anymore. I stood in front of her and she stood up and I looked into her eyes. Whenever I looked into her eyes, I felt like I falling into an abyss in her eyes. I felt like I was floating in front of her eyes. I kissed her and she kissed back. We went to another word with our acts.

There was a knock on the door I adjusted my dress and put a bedsheet on Loveleen and opened the door. It is the attender with the coffee. I took the coffee and put it on the table and locked the door. I woke her up and told her to have coffee. Sipping coffee, I looked at her. She got up from the berth and adjusted her dress and sat on the berth and picked the cup. I thought about last night. Compared to our previous encounters she was a little cold last night. Does it have anything to do with the train journey, or is she moving towards a colder persona? Is she the type to blow hot and blow cold? Does she change her persona like seasons? Maybe should I expect a colder person like the one when she was in Delhi when we first went there? Except when she was crying on my shoulder about her husband the way she behaved during that trip, she was all high handed. Did she keep a kind of curtain on her personality and she pulled the curtain during the time she cried? Did she do it purposefully or is it because she had been emotional at that time. Slowly she cut down on the high handedness with me. When was it she stopped showing me that part of that person? Even during her effort to impregnate Dhruv, she was all high handedness, otherwise why the need to do that way. Maybe after winning the elections, she has changed her outlook on me. Or was it her father who had softened his stance towards her, which flowed to me?

Finishing her coffee Loveleen asked what are you thinking? I said I am thinking how beautiful you look. She looked at me for a second and asked isn't this beauty all yours? Does it mean she had awarded me her full rights? Or only rights to the intimacy we had?

I got up and took a towel and said I will have a bath and come. I went into the bathroom had a quick shower, dried myself and back into the coupe. I changed into another dress and sat down. She asked why the sudden feel to have a bath, we will be in Delhi in an hour or so. I said I felt like a cleanup is necessary for me. I packed the bags and kept it aside. When the train reached the station, I called a porter handed him the luggage and booked a cab, reached the hotel indicated by the Noida Branch manager. Took the room keys and went to the room. It was still hot outside unlike in Bombay where it would cool down after summer. The room's ac is running and I sat down on the sofa. Loveleen opened her bag and took out a dress and went to the bathroom to have a bath. I sat back and looked at the ceiling. Then finding today's newspaper on the table I picked it flicked

through the pages. Loveleen came out of the bathroom wearing a Punjabi dress. I have rarely seen her wearing Punjabi dresses. She came and sat beside me on the sofa kissed me on the cheek and asked how do I look? I said I don't seem to remember when you wore dresses. Let me have a look at you before answering that question. She turned towards me sitting there. I looked her over and the dress brought her figure to the forefront. I said stand up and she stood in front of me. I put my hand around her at her waist and pulled her closer and kissed her on the stomach and said you are looking damn sexy. If we don't have work now I would have led you to the bedroom. Having satisfied with my words, she came and sat down on the sofa. I said let us go and have something and then we will proceed to the factory. He said come out of the hotel take a left and turn left at the next road and look for no. 102 on the right. We came down to the restaurant and sat down. The waiter said the breakfast section closed, if you would like to order something. We ordered omelet with bread and waited to be served. We signed the bill went in search of the factory as he instructed. It took us just two minutes. We entered the premises and we were expected by the Security and he called the Branch Manager and he took us to the computer room. We went sat down and looked around. It is a big room with a partition with glass paneling. Two tables were placed on the one side of the room. Ac is blasting in the room keeping it cool. After just minutes of walking we felt the heat of the Delhi and we felt cool with wind of the ac. He showed me the new server placed there. He showed me an old system besides on another table. He said that is a Novel NetWare server. I took the floppies from my bag started preparing the server. It took me five minutes to transfer the data. Then I checked the program by running if I have missed anything. The server is being ready I went to the systems indicated by the Branch Manager and gave shortcuts and finished my work. We were called by the Branch In charge, he is another brother of the Director at Bombay. I went and told him our work is completed here and we would go to Delhi tomorrow to complete the installation. He told us to sit and asked about the time when we were had to fly to Madras. I told I went to Meet Mr. Naidu regarding some political issue and we got the afternoon appointment and your EDP guy had asked me to go to Delhi, we completed the meeting and rushed to Madras. He said I heard a lady accompanied you there, is she? I said she was the Hyderabad contact for our software, I went there to install their hospital software. During the time I asked her to get me an appointment with Mr. Naidu. I returned to Bombay and rushed back for the appointment. This is our Director and major shareholder. She is the inspiration behind the company. He asked how so? I said if she had not supported me, I could not have done all this. He asked why are you personally

doing the installations, why not send your developers. I said I still feel the developers need to have more understanding of the things. One has to know servers, software and data being the main concern. If the data is not transferred properly you will not know until later the idea of missing data. He asked me how do you all this and my brother told me you were running the factory as a manager before starting the company. How long were you running this software company. I said around 3 years. I feel there is a dearth of good programmers in India. We are in the starting phase of the software and over that good programmers like to go to USA. They were literally pulled by the high salaries there. You can ask why can't we give good salaries here. You have to take in cost of living into consideration here. With the salaries we are paying our developers and our overhead costs we can offered to give this software for 2 lakhs each, if we give the salaries as in the West, we can't give you this software below 10lakhs. He said you have a point there. You can only manage if the scale of operations and sales need to be higher than what it is. I said people don't know by using software how much man hours they are saving. How many things on our finger tips. If you want to know the outstandings it would take a minute for the report to be generated. If it on manual accounting, if you ask today, you may get the report tomorrow. He said yes, I have seen both the phases. But if the system stop we can't continue with our operations. I said that is what I am trying to achieve. There should be minimal disruptions. You check with your madras branch how many times they got a bug and system can't be used. Maybe they got power problems and could not use the systems. He said that's correct they had not reported any problems and that is the reason for our confidence to continue installation at our branch. Now he shifted his attention to Loveleen, he asked her are you from Delhi? She said born and brought up in Delhi. He was asking where she stayed and who are her family members and things like that. He was surprised when he learned that she was the Haryana CM's daughter. She said Kumar has some hand in their winning the elections, he had used some predictive software to help them win the elections. He said that is the reason for his entry into the software field. She said you can say that. It was my father who indirectly helped him to come to this field, he told me to provide all the necessary help for him. I looked at the time and said I think it is lunch time, we will have lunch go to our room. He said I will get something to eat. I said thanks, but we would like to have some privacy as we have to discuss some business matters. He said ok, will you complete the Delhi installation tomorrow. I said we will complete. He asked do you want me to send you a car? I said no thanks, we already have a car with driver and a flat in Delhi for our office space. We want to set up our office there. We will vacate the room and

go to Delhi tomorrow. I thanked him we went to the restaurant in the hotel we stayed. We had our lunch and went back to the room.

Next day we readied and called Vishal to bring the car to Noida and vacated the room and went over to Delhi flat and put the luggage there and reached their Delhi office. We completed the installation and they just had two computers and told them to check the software and went for the lunch in meanwhile. They were satisfied with the software and the Branch manager from Noida came over and checked the things and we were back in our flat by 4 pm. We have arranged computer set up in the office, to send someone there for looking after the branch returned by late night flight back to Bombay.

November 1994.

Kumar

We were back in Hyderabad. Our flat and office space was ready. We went over and got the flat redecorated with our staff from Loveleen's firm and they concentrated on our office space. I have stationed myself with Loveleen to set up our software and hardware part of the company and Loveleen concentrated on setting up her firm. I was in constant touch with Mr. Naidu who is looking after the election work where the elections are declared to be conducted in the month of December. The money they allot to be distributed to voters, I forbid them to be used for distribution and instead to be used for community service in the area. Like fitting drinking water pumps and things like that. I have used the community service I planned for Maharashtra in those areas like I got them to use the money meant for distribution is to be used for this purpose. I said let the opposition distribute the money, the voters will use it and forget them. These kinds of welfare measures, they will keep them in their heart. I think this is what your leader wants in the end. They would launch these community services with much fanfare and people will throng to those functions without any invite from surrounding areas. They would request those things to be provided in their area too. Instead of going to the party in power, they would ask these party candidates for those services. With the money they set aside for the distribution, they could offer to provide these services. Now the election commission people can't include these amounts spent in the candidate's expenses, as the welfare works were started before the notification of the elections. The party in power could not do anything to stop them from doing these welfare activities. If they try to stop them it will backfire on them only.

With this background, the elections were conducted and everyone is awaiting results. I was confident of their winning, I did not even watch the news for knowing the results. When Mr. Naidu sent us the box of sweets I came to know they won the elections with a thumping majority. In the next month, we got contracts to their privately-held businesses. These include a hospital and other factories and businesses. We supplied to the hospital at nominal cost.

Completing our setup of the office there and we went to Bombay for the marriage of Ram and Nishitha. The marriage was conducted with much pomp and gaiety. We had many VIPs and business magnets attending the marriage. It was a grand affair conducted at our bungalows. Most of the relatives have attended for two reasons, one being it was to be the last marriage in our family and second it will be a grand affair with our business booming. Some relatives just attended to see our bungalows. Other cousins have attended for my parties. So, everyone attended the marriage for one reason or another. I could see all our relatives and they were amazed at what I could achieve in a short time. On one side the marriage reception is going on and on another side, I have arranged for the party. Mr. Naidu could not attend himself but he had sent someone on his behalf. Then courier company management had attended with some guests from the USA. Then the Godrej MD and some managers attended. Then there are top Management people from hospitals. And Some Sena Shakha Pramukhs from Bombay also attended. We had discussed the winning of the Andhra elections, which I advised on the basis of our talks and the meeting attended by the Shakha Pramukhs. I told them I advised them to use the money reserved for distribution during elections to be used in welfare works, which would get higher returns without having to look back who is watching. They agreed if it worked in Andhra, that could also work for them. They went back happy to start campaigning on this mode of operation in their constituencies. The elections would be announced any day now as the five-year period is coming near.

Now I would be getting regular updates to from the Vakola Shakha Pramukh on the works going on and the result on the electorate. At the last minute, BJP asked to join them in the elections. I gave them the list of constituencies where BJP is strong and Sena is weak and told them to offer these seats to them which would strengthen their bond and they could expect better results.

Kirit has married at Mira Road at the venue fixed by the bride's family and we attended the marriage with family. Mahira went over to Hyderabad before the wedding thus missing it.

Then I had arranged for Chitti and Krishna to be married and Chitti's family came from the village and they were happy she is living a good life here with us. Now Krishna is working with us to manage the affairs of the companies.

Chapter 2

The year 1995 January.

Kumar

Now I want our Hyderabad branch into a development centre rather than a sales office. We have taken another office space on the 2nd floor for our development centre in the same building. Our flat is ready for occupation and one bedroom is reserved for me and another for Loveleen and another bedroom used for guests coming over to the firm. Loveleen stayed over to look after her interior decorations firm. So, I decided to set up the development centre to be closer to her. I called Joy to look after the setting up of the development centre and went back to Bombay.

Now Sena wants to build a hospital for the poor. We got many big companies investing for the development of the hospital. I have taken the help of Subba Rao to design the building and consulting on the building of the hospital. For his help, I promised to develop software for his Energy manufacturing company they were building in Andhra.

On the 21 of January, I arranged a big party and a party for our guests and a separate party for the students and friends of Atul and Reena.

I took Sunitha over to Madras and we set up a sales office there and left her with her sister to set up and run the office for the time being. Then I sent Nishitha and Ram to Bangalore for setting up offices for all the three companies. With a small development centre for software, hardware sales offices and setting up of Loveleen Interior decoration firm. I let Nishitha run the interior decoration firm for the region from there. When it is up and running I have sent a developer there to look after the software centre and he will co-ordinate with Mahira for sales of Hardware.

Maharashtra Sena with the alliance of BJP had won the elections and had their first CM. I kept my word with the Sena that they would defeat the ruling party and won the elections. With my full attention on developing our companies, I left the politics management to them. I stopped interfering in their affairs and did not totally cut the ties but decreased my interactions with them.

Now Haryana elections were coming up next year, they have not contacted for consultancy, I did not find it prude to offer my advice without their request.

By the 31st of March, 1995 our branches in Hyderabad, Madras and Bangalore were up and running and we were getting orders.

We kept our Delhi office small and we did not have any branch in Calcutta.

In the month of April, I interchanged the directors working in the branches. I sent Nishitha and Ram to Madras to develop the interior decorations part of the firm. Sunitha went over to Bangalore to look after the three firm's development and Loveleen went back to Bombay calling a girl from their firm to look after the branch. We had setup a table at offices for Pan India Matrimonial services. It seems to be booming with enquiries. I left the total control of that company to Loveleen to manage with Mr. Lal. Seeing the progress of each branch I am managing the personnel there. We slowly started to appoint managers at the branch level so they can take over operations. Now we made these branches under separate company managing operations of the three companies for the convenience of management. So, each branch is managed by a Manager and I let Loveleen manage the company as MD. All the branch managers would report to her and they will work independently of the parent companies. If they need to supply any software from the parent company they would pay us development costs. Let us say the Madras branch sold hospital software. They would manage the installation and would pay my company development costs. Then they would order hardware from Kids firm and they would get a commission. Whatever they are doing the interior development company is their own. This way we have decreased the burden on the software and hardware companies in Bombay and passed on the work to the branches under Loveleen. This way we have diversified the company. The parent company holds all the shares in the branch company. So, all the directors of the company are automatically directors of the branches company. We named the company Loveleen Kumar and Associates. This way I attached my name to Loveleen. I thought Sahithi would show her disapproval when I finalized the name, but she kept quiet.

Mahira would look after the interests of the kid's company from Bombay. She would arrange for the orders as they come over. Her work is to supply hardware and look after the renting of the bungalows.

Throughout the year I was checking the progress of the branches were making and moving the directors back to Bombay when the managers settled down in their posts. I am getting good reports from Hyderabad that their Interior decoration business is blooming and Loveleen showed interest to go and look after the businesses from there. Sunitha is looking after the Madras branch from

Bombay, also looking after the Bombay operations as before. Joy is now in Bangalore looking after setting up a development centre there and she would return back to Hyderabad to continue development from there. The year 1995 saw a lot of development of companies and Nandini came over to Bombay to help me in building the hospital. I asked her about her marriage proposal. She said talks are on with the groom's family. As her father was busy with the energy company building, he could not get time to meet with the groom's family to finalize the matter. It seems they did not agree on some items like gold and assets. She was not interested in those talks and she would say when it happens, happens what is the urgency when you are there for me. I would say don't talk like that in front of everybody.

Chapter 3

The year 1996 January.

Kumar

Everyone from the branches came over to attend the birthday of Atul and Reena. As every year it was a grand affair with many VIPs and company directors and the likes.

I appointed a CA firm to audit the accounts of the branches. After finishing auditing the branches, they would check our accounts. I am waiting for the financial year-end to see the progress the company made during the last year of operations.

I have not received any request from Haryana for consultancy on the elections and I did not think much of them as I don't need their support for running my companies. We are expanding without any backing and I sent Sunitha to identify land to build an office in Madras near the airport. When she identified the land, I took help from Mr. Subba Rao's real estate team in building an office there. Sunitha would go once in a while to check the construction. The hospital work will be completed soon and I asked Nandini's help in procuring the equipment and installation. Now the hospital is for a good cause, everyone is giving a hand in the construction of the hospital. She informed me that now she is engaged and the marriage is slated for the year end. A mahurat will be fixed soon. I promised her we all will attend the wedding. At last, Nandini will become Mrs. Prathap.

Month of March

We sat in front of the tv and were watching the election results. With the help of BJP, they won the elections and their party head had announced the next CM. After so many years they can rule the state.

When the accounts are finalized I went through each of the companies and checked the combined worth. Our investments have increased by 500 per cent during the year 1995-96. And profitability increased by over 75 per cent, which would a great achievement. Except Kirit everyone had a hand in our management.

The year went through with me travelling from branch to branch checking their workings and moving people around. Now with the help of Mr. Subba Rao's

energy company we got an order from the USA for a company that manages loans for these energy companies. I thought Joy would like to go there as she had experience there, but she refused to set foot in the USA, it seems she is still scared of her husband. Now Loveleen showed interest to go to the USA for finalizing the deal. We went together and finalized the deal and spend some time travelling and visiting various places there. We came back after one month of travelling to the US. After coming back, I verified the progress of the development with Joy. She said it is going satisfactory and is being developed at Bombay centre. After so much constant travelling I could hardly give time to Sahithi, I felt her slipping from my hand. She became distant again and would look after her work and ignore my presence. I tried to keep the children close and would provide what they require when asked. I would take them on trips if they had holidays. This way I visited all the branches with them and they would stay with our relatives when on tour. So, they would get to know them better.

Chapter 4

The year 1997 Month of Jan.

Kumar

Now Atul and Reena are 10 years old and next academic year they would be going to high school. And Dhruv would be going to LKG.

Now our further investments have come down. We are investing from our profits and only, and I have not asked Loveleen for further investments. As her father is in now opposition, I did not try to put pressure on her to do investments this year. I know we could manage the firms without her investments. Then in the south her interior decoration business is booming. The hospital building completed and the installation of the equipment is complete, we are waiting for the dates of our CM for inaugurating the hospital. At last he gave the date of 26th Jan. they wanted to gift the hospital to the state on the republic day. On 21st we had our kids' birthday. This time I let them have the kid's birthday, they could call their friends and our office staff and relatives. Nandini, Mr. Subba Rao, Rahul have come to the birthday and would stay over for the inauguration. They had a big hand in the building and Nandini had a hand in setting up the equipment and Rahul agreed to be honorary surgeon with the hospital. He would allot some days in a month for a free consultation and surgeries. I asked about their fixing the marriage of Nandini. He said Prathap would be visiting for the inauguration and they will discuss the matter then. The Hospital inauguration went without a hitch and the CM has opened the hospital to the state and every one is welcome to have free medical treatment there. It would be a great achievement a private hospital would give free treatment to the poor. In the evening I arranged a party on the occasion of the inauguration of the hospital. Many VIPs and many politicians have attended the party, it was also a success party for us.

Mr. Subba Rao sat with the Prathap's family and I had called a purohit from the Mahim temple. A date fixed for March, 21. I suggested they perform marriage at our bungalows, in consultation with Mahira would keep the bungalows free for those days, when they are required. Both the parties agreed to the suggestion. They Went away to Hyderabad to start the preparations.

On March 21, 1997 Nandini became Mrs. Prathap.

After that we were busy with the closing of financial year. We want to close the pending works or projects, so that our payments will be cleared.

Then the new financial year came and I am behind Sunitha to get her marketing team to get the projects they were chasing in the last financial year and who would have budgeted for the new software and hardware.

Mr. Naidu's PA rang me up and asked shall we book you space in the newly constructed Cyber Towers. I asked the price of space and what area is available and said I will check the finances and let him know. I went to Sunitha and enquired about the finances and what amount is available for investment. I know big, big companies are taking up space in Cyber Towers. They must have blocked for us some space there. It would be a good idea to invest there. I went and checked with Loveleen and told her about the offer. She said to check the finances and book the area. If we don't have finances we can sell the land near Nandini's house. I said it is a good idea. Nandini told me a college was asking about the land, they have already brought the land around our land. I said we will try to squeeze them for a good price. I called up Nandini and said you were telling about the college wants our land, we will sell if the price is right. Then I want to invest the money in the cyber towers. She said she will speak with their real estate agent about the prices.

I told the PA to go ahead and book for our office space in the cyber towers. Then I told Nandini to sell the land for whatever the best price she gets and have the money sent for paying for the Cyber Towers.

I took Loveleen to Hyderabad to look after our offices. She was looking after her interior designing firm and I am looking after our software and hard ware divisions. Then from there, we went over to Bangalore and after finishing up we went over to Madras. There we checked the progress of our finished office building. They will be shifting to the new building. We stayed back and inaugurated the building and supervised the shifting and went back to Bombay.

The total trip took us one month and we were back in Bombay and the kids came running to us. I kissed Dhruv first, then Reena and Atul. I enquired about their studies. Then went over to my room to change.

After a week I got a call from Nandini about a bungalow beside their bungalow owned by a doctor from another hospital, who wants to sell the house. I went over and looked at the house. I was on a hill top and near to the plot of land we sold off. Now there a school and college are coming up. We got this house quite cheap with Nandini's intervention and we arranged for payments with 50% cash and we took a loan for the remainder of the price.

Then I went and looked at a land in Madhapur. It is quite big and we can build a small Cyber tower there. It is around 100 acres. I immediately purchased the land and Loveleen adjusted the payments. She must have done that from her husband's property. I purchased the land in Loveleen's name. On Dhruv's birthday, I presented the land to Dhruv.

I have been investing excess profits after giving dividend into real estate all over India.

Now all our branches are operated from our own premises.

Chapter 5

The year 1998 Jan.

We had a small party for Atul's & Reena's birthday and we limited invitations to their friends and relative and our friends. I don't want to spoil their party with our drinks party. Also, most of our top management is spread over India. Sunitha is at Madras, Nimisha and Ram are at Bangalore. Loveleen is in Delhi and Mahira went over to Hyderabad to complete a hard ware contract and Joy is permanently stationed at Hyderabad to look after the development from there.

At the end of the financial year, we found we had a good year and our profits have increased over 50% overall. Loveleen's firm's income exceeded last year's by over 100%. Hyderabad branch we have invested more than others and we got good returns from our investments.

For this financial year I have shifted people around. Nimisha and Ram I have shifted to Hyderabad. Sunitha is sent to Bangalore and Mahira is back at Bombay. From Delhi Loveleen went over to Madras, when they received a big order for Interior decoration. I went over for a week to check the marketing at the Branch. Now Sahithi got more work at Bombay, as the only permanent management available in Bombay she had to look after the Operations too. We have taken an Operations Manager and she would supervise the manager. I am asking reports from each branch on their operations, marketing, installations, etc. We have started using internet exclusively for our operations. We have got reports that this year the cyber towers offices would be allotted to us after completion of the building.

For his birthday we took Dhruv on a tour.

In the month of October end, we got the possession of the office space and we had given to Loveleen's firm for preparing office space. Now Sahithi had to come and look after the work here.

Chapter 6

The Year 1999 Jan.

In the new year, we have shifted our offices to Cyber Towers. Having offices in Cyber Towers had become a prestige symbol. We got an order from another hospital for hospital applications, it is from the doctor we have purchased the bungalow. I have sent Joy to personally look into the installation.

I came back to Bombay for children's birthday. After their birthday I stayed back in Bombay for a month looking after the companies from there.

After summer ending I had sent Loveleen to Madras to look after a project there.

In the month of November Joy had to go to Bangalore for a software project. They have got a project from the US for Y2K Bug clearance.

In the month of July, I went over to Hyderabad to check the progress of the developments. Loveleen went over to Madras to check the work there. Manisha and Ram went back to Bombay to help Sahithi with a project there. After checking with Mr. Naidu's PA regarding the coming elections. After checking the atmosphere, I said carry on as you were doing. There won't be much change in the results.

Nandini called me from the hospital to check if I am available in the flat or not. I said I am here, but the servant went away, if you want something to eat, better get from outside. She said nothing like that She is coming to speak with me on an urgent matter. I said then come over I am free. I she came over after half an hour with a bottle in hand. I brought two glasses and she removed some snacks from the bag and placed them on the plate. I asked her what is the problem. She said she is having some doubts about her husband. I asked her why? She said he has not given me a kid yet. I said you work in a hospital, you better get yourself checked. She said I got myself checked and Prathap is refusing to get checked. If he refuses you might find a way to get him checked. She said from the time I asked him to get checked, he is behaving differently. I asked how? He might have thought, I will get his semen checked, so he is not letting me collect it secretly, so I am having a doubt on him, he must have got it checked. I asked then what do you want to do? She said I want you to fulfill your promise. I asked what promise? She replied did you forget you promised to give me a child. I said yes, I remember. She said that promise. I said how can I fulfill the promise now, you are married to Prathap, if he had already got his potency checked, wouldn't

he get doubt that you cheated him. She said he already had that doubt from the time we went to his office to check on him. I asked do you have any problems in the marital life, because of that? She said nothing like that. But I feel he has some doubts about that. I said there is a saying in Telugu when asked who is the pumpkin thief, the thief checks his shoulders if it is still there. You were talking like that. Because we had a relationship, you are thinking like that. I don't know if it would be appropriate to fulfil the promise I gave you. She said you have to fulfil that promise, so I came to you with that thought only. I said what are you waiting for, come to the bedroom.

I stayed in Hyderabad for a week and she would come daily to my flat.

When the Andhra election results came they won with a thumping majority. This time I have not much hand in their elections. But they have helped us a lot in having a foot in the Hyderabad Software market.

Chapter 7

Kumar

It is 30th December 1999.

I was feeling there is a danger coming upon us. I checked all around the house. Did not find anything suspicious. We had a meeting with Sena Pramukh about the debacle in the elections. Shakha Pramukh said the members of the party are angry with you. They are saying they have not been advised properly this time. You have given them wrong projections, which is why the loss in the elections. I said forget about those members, what do you think about losing in the elections. He said you have given your 100 per cent in this election. We just lost by 8 seats. The opposition alliance was done after the results. Another point they have raised is that you have gone over to Hyderabad and had not concentrated on our elections. They are saying it could be the reason for our failure. I said I told you many times in the past that I am no politician, I am a businessman, we were expanding our business in the south and we found Hyderabad to be a good base for managing our businesses in the south. However, I kept an eye on your elections and advised as seem fit. I thought being in the power you will have some upper hand in the elections. He said whatever happened, happened and this section of members are asking me to remove you from the advisory panel. I said it is up to you. I don't mind not thinking about politics, I can concentrate on my business. I am not a miracle worker. Thanks for the support you have given me all these years. Bye and came out of their office.

I went back to the office and Joy said their software project for the US client has been approved after testing and they have started using the software and they have wired the final payment. I said we will have a party tomorrow for the 31 December night. Call all the people, we should show the clients we have beat the Y2K bug. She said this time you were away for a long time. I said we have started branches in other cities of the South. I was allotting the staff around those new branches. We are sending experienced people there and appointing new people at Hyderabad. You know we had taken offices in Cyber Towers. Under the CM's rule, the software would grow exponentially. We might shift our software division there. We are going to lose Sena's support here. Maybe we will sell these properties and shift there. Joy said I don't have any problem, shifting over there. I was always asking you to shift me to other branches. But all this while you were telling me that I should operate in Head Quarters. I said I am only thinking about kids' 10th standard studies next year. Dhruv is already

studying there. I am thinking about Atul and Reena. I might take them there and put them on the CBSE syllabus. I was told there are good schools there. I might check with them. I will check with the schools if they will accept them there for the 9th standard. I have to speak with Sahithi, I don't know how she feels about it. She can hand over the office to Nishitha and come over there. Tomorrow at the party I will announce the shift after confirming with the others. We will have a board meeting tomorrow. Call everyone for the meeting. She said ok, I will tell Pauleen to inform them.

Joy said Sunitha is miffed with you. I asked why? She said there are rumours that you are living with Loveleen in Bangalore and she is pregnant with your child. I asked is she pregnant? She has not even told me. I have not been to Bangalore for the last six months. In fact, she was staying in Madras for the last six months. I expressed surprise and said I will speak with her now. I asked what you were saying about Sunitha? Joy said she is saying you have forgotten her. I said see I have not forgotten her, why am I planning to shift the offices to Hyderabad, so she will be closer to me only. I think you know our relationship, she is dear to me. I have already booked a bungalow beside Nandini's bungalow. She got them to sell cheap. Joy asked what is your relationship with Nandini? I said she is a good friend. We maintained that relationship despite our differences of opinion. Now she is married and she is expecting a baby. She is happy with her life. She has helped me a lot in getting a foot in the Hyderabad software market. I had brought a big plot of land in Madhapur on her advice. Now many builders are approaching for building a tower in line with Cyber Towers. I have not decided yet on that. We will discuss all these matters in tomorrow's meeting. I will prepare an agenda and send it to you all.

The board meeting, went as well as expected. Seeing our success everyone on the board voted for whatever proposals I have put forward. Each one of them in their right is a millionaire. And the profits are going up exponentially every year from the time of incorporation. I informed them that we are having a private party with only close people in the evening. I don't want to call our clients and all. Only the members of our companies and sister concerns and family members.

It is eight 8 pm. I checked with Krishna that all the arrangements were perfect. I went over to change into formals for the party. I went into the kitchen for a cup of tea before changing. I went towards the kitchen, no one seems to be in the house. they all must be at the party. As I was entering the kitchen I saw Joy standing over the kitchen sink and washing her hands. Then my eyes fell on a man creeping on her from behind with a raised knife in his hand. I shouted hey,

who are you? He looked at me and looked at Joy who turned toward him hearing my voice, terror lit her face. I understood who he is. He must be her husband who finally found out she is staying here. He looked at me and her and me. He must be unsure how to proceed further. His drug-induced mind must be numb. I went over to him to catch his hand and to take the knife from his hand. At the last minute, he transferred his knife to another hand. I am no fighter and that move has confused me. When I went for his hand which is holding the knife, he transferred the knife to another hand, then he plunged the knife in my side. I caught my side with my hand. He now plunged at Joy with the knife in waist height. I caught him by his collar and pulled him toward me. He got pulled by my catching his collar, came back and slammed into me from his back. We both fell backwards, he on top of me, we both facing up. I did not waste my opportunity and caught his throat on hold with both hands. With the lack of oxygen, he started lashing out. I did not let go of my hold even with my throbbing side. He became limp and I released him. He may not be dead but would out for a few minutes, I shouted to Joy call someone. Call police and ambulance. She seemed confused and shouted help. Sunitha heard the sound came running. She looked at the scene and took a small towel, wet it in the sink water and put it on my side and told Joy to call for an ambulance. When she did not hear what she is saying called her to come close, when she came close she told her to catch the cloth to my side. Joy kneeled and held the cloth. Sunitha got up and went to the phone and called for an ambulance first and then the police. She then looked at the assailant and checked for his pulse. He seemed to have some pulse. She asked Joy did he attack Kumar? She replied yes. She looked around and found a wooden stick used for making powders, caught and stood over him, else if he came to conscience he may attack again. I started to lose consciousness. Then everything became dark.

Sunitha

I took one look at the scene and understand what happened there. Whatever Kumar taught over the years and my air hostess training has come to use here. I applied a wet cloth on his wound and asked Joy to attend to him. I went and called the ambulance and police. By the time ambulance has arrived Kumar became unconscious. They took a look at him and applied first aid to his wound and took him away in the ambulance. Then police arrived and took Joy's husband into custody. I told them he had come to attack Joy and it seems he had injured Kumar with the knife found on the scene. Joy was still in shock but nodded her head in affirmation.

Krishna rang back from the hospital that they had been taken to the emergency room and they were looking for any relatives. I said I will bring Sahithi with me. I went looking for Sahithi, she was speaking with some guests oblivious to the goings-on here. I caught her hand, took her to Kumar's car, and asked his driver to drive. We both sat down and started to drive asking where to go. I told him the address of the hospital. She asked what happened. I said nothing to worry about, Kumar is slightly injured. Did you not hear the sound of the Ambulance? She said from the evening my ears were ringing. Nothing can be heard. Then what are you speaking with the guests I asked? She said I am looking at their mouths and replying. I asked now? She said now the ringing is reduced. Who could have done it? I asked her what? She said you said someone had injured Kumar. I said I think it is Joy's husband. She asked why would he do that? I said he must have come to take revenge on Joy and Kumar must have intervened in between. She sat silently looking at the windshield. I thought how could she sit so calmly. Then she spoke Kumar told me something like this could happen. He told me to stay strong for the sake of the children. But how can I stay strong? She put her face in between her hand and started crying. I put my hand on her shoulder and stroked lightly. When we reached the hospital, she rubbed her eyes and came with me to the emergency ward. We enquired at the emergency ward nursing station. They asked was he the one brought with a knife wound in the side? I said yes. She said I will call the doctor. The doctor came over and said that they have taken him to the operation theatre, now he is back. I said it was just a knife wound at the side. The doctor said there are complications, we will let you know when we have something to tell you. He told Sahithi you can go and see him for a minute. After seeing Kumar, she came back.

We sat down on a bench. After two hours the doctor came and informed me that Kumar is no more. Sahithi has started crying. I was shocked and asked what happened doctor? He said we will let you know when the post mortem is completed. I caught Sahithi and sat there. Krishna came and asked what happened. With a sad face, my eyes full of tears, I informed him that he is no more. He just stood there. I said go and inform others. He went away.

After finishing the ceremonies, the people returned home. The next day the lawyer came with the Kumar's will. He had made all the provisions for the company management. The Kids firm he has handed over to three members team with Loveleen and Sahithi and one more person from Sunitha, Mahira or Joy can join with them to run the company. Then there are detailed reports on the running of the other companies and branches. There were the accounts

submitted with each partner's shares mentioned. He must be knowing the coming danger. It was to be Joy but he saved her and gave his life for her.

I was given a floppy disk in a sealed cover. I will check the floppy later, it must be the one he was telling me about, the password I love you Sunitha reverberated in my head. I know he did not forget me even in his death. He has left me his legacy, his story for me to present to the world.

But I could not find the software he was telling so much about, predicting the elections. It was not there on his laptop or the server. There were no copies of the software anywhere. It seems there is never any software for the predictions and it was all his predictions. He advised them based on the circumstances.

After a few days we started hearing rumours that unhappy with his performance in the elections, someone had helped Joy's husband to go to his house. Some people said it was the ruling party in Haryana that had him killed, a slow death. Now they put back Loveleen's father's party in opposition, they don't want him to win elections again with his help. Whoever it was, they wanted to discredit Kumar by getting Joy killed. It seems he did not want that to happen and had given his life to preserving his standing in society. He died a brave man.

Chapter 8

Sahithi

Jan 13, the Year 2000.

I sat in the bedroom looking out at the sea. What I thought and what happened. My Kumar is no more. For whom I should live. The kids are his and Sneha's. Leena is not really my daughter as he explained later she is some other Sahithi's daughter. On his death bed, he had explained how all this works. He also said laughing, I will return. The words I will return is reverberating in my mind. I tried closing my ears. But still no effect. Then someone knocked on the door. I looked towards the door, it's Manisha, now she is my co-sister. She said come Bhabi the puja is about to start. I said I am coming Bhabi. Earlier we used to call each other by names but now at home, we call each other Bhabi and at the office, we use the previous way of calling each other by names. I got up and went down to the place the puja is arranged. Atul stood before the photo of Kumar and I looked at the photo I felt it is saying I am coming. I dropped to the floor due to exhaustion, that is the last thing I remembered, "I am coming".

PART 7

Return of Kumar from the Dead

Chapter 1

Kumar

I woke up on a stretcher in a hospital. The nurse shouted madam he opened his eyes. I looked at the side she was shouting at. A lady of around 30 years of age, who seemed pregnant of around 7 months came looked at me and said Kumar are you ok. I thought she recognized me as Kumar, ok. I asked where am I. She said you are in our hospital. I said our hospital, where is this hospital? She called Doctor, he seemed to have forgotten everything. A doctor came and checked and said he seems ok, there are no injuries. The doctor said this hospital is in Hyderabad. I said ok Hyderabad, how did I get here? He said someone placed you on the stretcher outside the hospital. The ward boy recognized you and they brought you inside. So, they must be knowing about me. I asked him who is the lady who is pregnant. He said did you forget her, she is the hospital administrator, she is Nandini. Ok, she is Nandini and she works here. It seems I also know her. She came back and said I called Bombay and informed Sahithi. I thought is Sahithi in Bombay, when did she come back? She said Sahithi, Sunitha, and Loveleen are coming here on the first available flight. Ok, she also knows Sunitha but who is this Loveleen, must be the interior designing company, Bob mentioned. Now, what do I have to do when they come here. She said you look younger, what is your age? I said I just turned 22 this April. She exclaimed oh, so young. I asked what year is this? She said the year 2000 month of February. I said Nandini do I know you? She exclaimed know you, we have been friends for the last six years and you fixed my marriage, did you forget? I said did I fix your marriage. Then who are these other persons you are mentioning? Sunitha, Sahithi, and the other lady you mentioned. She said you don't remember them also. Sahithi is your wife and Sunitha is your Operations Director and also your girlfriend. Then Loveleen is also your partner in these businesses you run. I asked do I have any children? She said you have two children Atul and Reena. I asked then where is Leena. She replied you forgot, you said she went back to her mother. I thought did she stay here before coming back to me? But she said he was with pujari and he wears *Dhoti*. I asked her do I wear dhoti? She asked why would you wear dhoti? You wear suits. So, he must be someone else. So, if I am wearing suits, he must be the one who died from a business background. What Bob said the businesses were in disarray and I have to go and control them. He must be having so much confidence in me. Did he tell me to learn the software for this purpose only? I asked Doctor can I stand up? He said try if you can stand up. I sat on the table and slowly I got

down from that. I felt a little dizzy at first but by catching the table I could get a grip over myself and could walk properly. I said I feel ok. The doctor said to Nandini he must be having some kind of amnesia. He must have forgotten everything. But how can he be so young? Then another doctor rushed in and asked Nandini, someone said Kumar had returned. She said apparently, but he looks so young and he says he is 22 years of age. Must be 15 years younger than us. He looked at me and said did he look like this when he came to you in 1987. She looked closely at me and exclaimed yes exactly like that. He said it seems like some kind of magic. Ok, you take him to his flat. He will have some rest. I thought I also have a flat here. He continued when they come from Bombay I will send them to the flat. She said come can you walk or shall we go in the car? I asked how much distance is the flat? She said better go by car. When we came out there was an ambulance standing there. She asked him to take us to the building. We sat and rode for a minute and the ambulance stopped we got down and took the lift up to the top floor. We came out and knocked on the door. A servant opened the door and Nandini took me in and sat me on the sofa. She told the servant to get him a cup of tea, it may revive him. So, she knows I drink tea also. I looked around the flat. It looks like a three-bedroom flat and is tastefully decorated. I asked who did the interior for this flat? She said did you forget, Loveleen got it decorated personally. I thought my theory is correct, Loveleen is looking after an interior decorating firm. She said take some rest when they come I will wake you. I looked at her where should I take a rest. She said I forgot, and lead me to the bedroom. I lay on the bed and she kissed me and said take a rest I will come back. I closed my eyes. I felt like I was falling from a great height. I woke up with a sudden jerk and opened and looked around the surrounding seemed unfamiliar. I sat up on the bed adjusted myself and sat with my back to the headboard. The servant lady came and can I get you something, sir? I said get me a glass of water and then something to eat. She said come to the dining table I will serve you lunch. I got up and went behind her to the dining room. I sat down on a chair and she put a plate in front of me and I served myself from the dishes placed in front of me. Everything is to my liking. She must know what I eat. After finishing lunch, I washed my hands and sat on the sofa and switched on the tv with a remote. The channels running on the tv are all seemed unfamiliar. What I know was all door darshan channels. Now all the language channels are coming from different brands. I was tired of just changing the channels. When I saw an old movie running I put down the remote and started to watch the movie. The doorbell rang and the servant went and opened the door. Sahithi, Sunitha and another Lady must be Loveleen entered the room. They kept looking at me in wonder as if they could not

believe their eyes. Sahithi said you took me to the time I first met you. Turned to Sunitha she said what do you think. Sunitha said I also felt the same, I felt like I am seeing him for the first time at Atul and Reena's birthday. Loveleen came and sat beside me and hugged me I looked into her eyes they were filled with tears. I looked at Sahithi and Sunitha both of their eyes were moist. So Loveleen is also close to me, to have hugged me like that. Sahithi asked can you travel? If you can travel we can go back to Bombay. I said I seem to be ok, I can travel. Loveleen said I will call the travel agent and book the tickets.

The servant is asking Loveleen madam, I heard sir was dead and you performed last rites also, how can he be back and so young also. She said that's what we were all wondering. She went to Sunitha and asked did he ever say he had any kind of premonition of his death? Sunitha replied when he returned from Hyderabad, Joy went to speak with him at the time he said I feel there is a danger coming up. Sahithi replied he seemed to have some kind of premonition, in just two days he had set all the things right. It seems he has some kind of backup plan. Sunitha said he was always talking about alternate universes and dimensions and timelines. He must have arranged to call back his former self from the past. She looked at me and asked what time do you remember last? I said somewhere in 1986. She said triumphantly, see he must have called him from 1986. Sunitha asked do you know software programming. I said I recently learned to program. She said see what I said, that must be when he brought the system at home and started practising. I said exactly, recently I brought a system and started practising. She asked what do you think about politics? I said I don't have much knowledge. Sahithi said that is good, don't go into the politics, that's what killed him. Loveleen asked what do you know about the companies we have. I said I don't have any companies. Sahithi said then he must have come from before he started the software company.

Sahithi asked what shall we do now. Sunitha said he had returned that is all for the time being. Once he sees the setup he will recollect the things. It would be in his DNA to run businesses. Now he came back he will see to their end. I thought whose end do I have to see? They told me to take a rest and I went back to the bedroom and laid down. Loveleen said I will go and have a look at the office. Sunitha said I will go and speak with Nandini and the doctors. Sahithi said I will go and sit with him. Sahithi came and sat beside me. I have not seen her for more than a year after the cancellation of our marriage. I called her near and kissed her, even though she looked older, my love for her came back to me. I asked her how is your daughter Leena? She asked do you remember Leena? I said she was living with me now. I left her to stay with my parents. She asked

did you know your brother married Nishitha? I asked are you talking about Nimisha? She said no, Nishitha. She is my assistant working with Loveleen firm. You may not know her, first, you brought her to our firm thinking she will be a good match for Kirit. I thought who is this Kirit. Seeing my blank face, you don't remember Kirit also, you worked in his factory for three years. So, I must have worked in a factory here. I said close the door and come to me. She went and closed the door. Her being my wife I should show some concern for her. I started kissing her, as I was missing her for more than a year and over that she is my daughter's mother. We had copulated and I rolled out from her tired. She said you seem tired why don't you take a rest, I caught her close and kissed her and said ok. I closed my eyes and try to sleep. I heard voices from the outside and opened my eyes and it is my sister and she also aged. She looked at me and asked is he really Kumar? He looks so young. Sahithi said yes, he seems to have come from 1986 or 87. She said he looked like before my marriage. Maybe before Sneha left. She asked do you remember Sneha. I said why would I forget her. She was taken away by her parents. My sister said it seems like after my marriage, where Sneha was taken away. I asked what did you say, did she attend your marriage? When was it? She said I was married in 1986, in my marriage she was taken away by her cousin Suresh from my marriage. She was pregnant at the time. That also you did not know? Did you know she had given birth to twins, Atul and Reena? What, I had married Sneha and she had twins with me. Now, what is this timeline?

I said it is all confusing, I will hear the full story at a later time. She said take rest, and went out. She said to them he remembers some things and he does not remember some things. He remembers Sneha but he forgot he had married her. He does not know about kids. But he seems to remember Leena, Sunitha said. He says Leena stays with him. He had left her at his parent's place. Sahithi said that must be the time he found her and left her at his mother to check her out. As an afterthought, Sunitha came and asked what age is Leena? I said around 8 or 9 exactly I don't know, she said it's ok and went out. She went and said it seems to be different he says she must be 9. It seems like he found her after returning from our house. She must have gone further back into the past. Loveleen came from the office and said I got the tickets so, let us go. We all went to the airport and took boarding passes. I felt elated that I am flying for the first time. I had taken Sunitha in the first-class train but never flown. It is not that I could not offer to fly, I did not get an opportunity to fly. There are no regular flights from Gunnavaram to Bombay. I had a little problem with the security check and later got on the flight. We reached Bombay and went over to the house. Now after seeing the house I understood why I was sent here to look

after the affairs of these companies. It is a big bungalow and it is bigger than Nimisha's. I would say many times bigger. So many rooms and a lady came and hugged me and I looked at Sahithi as who she is. She said to her Nishitha he forgot a lot of things. He does not recollect you. I said bhabhi. She said what is this new calling, you always called me Nishitha only. I am saying about our relationship. She said I will show you the video of your brother asking me to marry. She took me to a tv and video player and showed me the video of them. The video showed me sitting on a chair, I looked older than what I am now, and then panned to the bar where Nishitha is picking up a glass, I looked at her as if she drinks in front of everybody. I with Sunitha and Anju only drank at my flat. Maybe they have habituated to the party culture here. Then she turned around and dropped her glass and was about to fall down and Ram caught her in one hand and glass in another hand. I clearly saw him pressing her boobs while catching her. I don't know it's intentional or unintentional. She ran away into the house. And I saw myself walking behind her and she was saying to me I want to marry your brother and I looked at the camera and on camera, my brother walked to her and asked her will you marry me. Then I brought both of them to an old fellow sitting and asked him will you give your daughter's hand to my brother. He must be her father. He asked me what does he do? Instead of telling me yes. I asked being my brother is not enough for you? What a corny dialogue. Then he got up and took their right hands placed one on another and my mom came and kissed her and said at last I got my daughter in law. I thought what about Sahithi, isn't she your daughter in law? There was clapping everywhere, and the movie finished. I asked who had directed this movie? She said if you want to see the same scene from the movie and started another video. In this Nishitha with another man enacted the same scene. This seemed to be taken from a movie. She said see the difference between both the videos. The first one is the original and the second one is an enactment for a movie. I nodded as I understood. Someone must have told the kids their daddy came. They came running and stopped in front of me, as if doubting if am their father. I said come on kids and kissed bothth of them. They grew up and must be in 9th or 10th. I asked what are you studying? They said they are in the 8th standard. I said sorry I forgot everything. Reena said you also look younger, how? I said I went to heaven and got a new body. She said oh, that is how you returned after death. Until that time nobody said the word death. I asked how did I die? She sat down beside me, there was a thief who came to kill Joy aunty and then he injured you and you caught him and did not leave him until he became unconscious. Then the ambulance came and took you to the hospital. But your dead body returned from the hospital. So, I died saving Joy. But where is she? I

asked but where is Joy. One lady said she went to Bangalore, she is also on the way. Then my parents came and my mother said I never thought I will lay my eyes on you. How did you come back from death? I said god came to me said you are required to look after the businesses and sent me down. I don't know who has believed and who had not believed. So, the start of people coming to see me old acquaintances or those who want to see the miracle. Krishna came and shook my hands. I asked where is Raj. He asked do you remember Raj? I said I remember him calling you Julie. He said but you never called me Julie. Then Chitti came and caught my hand and cried anna. I looked at Krishna as who she is? He said you don't remember Chitti, she came to look after Reena and Atul, now she is my wife. I said ok. Then Kirit came and introduced himself. I said sorry I could not remember you. He said then you may not remember Mahira also. Mahira came and stood before me. I said I seem to remember your name, did you come to the courier company for an interview. She said yes, Rajesh and Balachander took my interview. I remember BM, Balachander and I were about to take the interviews. So, it must be Rajesh who is my replacement in her interview. So, you are still working with the courier company. She said I left the company long back, now I am looking after the children's company as MD. Then Loveleen brought a boy younger than Atul and he said, Daddy. Loveleen said he is Dhruv and he is your godson. I caught him and kissed him. Then Mr. Deshpande came to meet. I said Mr. Deshpande and got up to shake his hands. He said please be seated I am sorry this has happened. I heard you have forgotten lots of things. I said I don't remember much only some things previous to 1987. But how did you remember me he asked? I said we had an interaction previously. So, now obviously I don't remember anything about politics. Sunitha told me the predictive software I used cannot be found. He said after all this, why should you care about our politics, forget about them and concentrate on running the business. I said I will get more information on our interactions but will leave the politics to your members. I said now all the partners come and let us discuss the problems at the company. Sunitha asked how do you know we had problems running the company? I said because I am sent here for the purpose of solving your problems. I think we have somewhere a meeting room. Sahithi said come we will go to the conference room at the office. I walked with them through the gates between the houses. Sahithi said this is your idea to install the gates, so we don't need to go outside the house to go from one house to another. I counted after two houses we went to the third bungalow. So, this must be our office building. It is looking like one of the bungalows. I asked what are you doing with the houses. Mahira replied we have not got any booking for the last one month. At present they are free. We entered the conference room,

I said everyone who is associated with our companies come and sit. I sat at the chair shown to me. When everyone gathered, some developers had to go get themselves chairs from outside. I said I have been sent by God to you to solve your problems. I think the companies are running in disarray with no proper head at the top, I thought I had made all the arrangements for the transition, but I did not think about appointing a business head for the companies. I thought with the training I gave you, you will take the companies forward in my absence. But it has not happened that way. I don't know how you are operating. First, I would like to hear the complaint from developers and then I will come to you. Now the developers you may speak up, but introduce yourselves. I have lost some part of my memories. I could not recollect anything from the time I have set up these companies and also my personal life from that time. One person got up and he said I'm Rajesh I am the senior-most member of this team. So, what is your problem? I looked at the person who is taking the notes. She must be my secretary or company's secretary. Looking me looking at her she looked up at me and said I am Pauleen your PA. I nodded and turned to Rajesh. He said I am not getting the respect I deserve from these junior developers. Now the other seniors you have sent to the branches to look after the branches. I told you I don't want to go anywhere as my family is here. I said your problem is no one respects you. Ok sit down, I will deal with you later. Next. Another developer got up and said we were getting lots of complaints from the clients for the new software we are developing. I heard you checked and passed the software previously and you reported the bugs and the software went without bugs. I said ok. Next. When the developer's complaints finished, I said you can go to your seats. Are there any complaints from other departments? Sahithi said the company we run without interference, your company's contribution is marketing only. I said then you are all from the top management only. Where is my brother Ram? Sahithi said he went with some group hiking. He could not be contacted. I said so he is not part of the company? Nishitha said he helps me with decorations related to acoustics and electronics and lighting. I said ok. Now tell me what is your problems. Mahira started we are not getting any orders for hardware. It seems when getting software orders, they are not following up on the hardware. I said ok, any other problems. She said none. So, what about renting the buildings, it seems they are not rented at the present time. She said we are doing some work to make them look different as the directors asked. I asked why should you take up that kind of work? You should let them do it or give it to someone else. Never waste money on something we don't get a return. Ok then who is next. Sahithi said you said you will get another assistant for me. Nishitha is spending more time travelling. I said I thought you got

someone to assist you, I will look into it. Any other problem. She said nothing. then who is next. Sunitha spoke we are not getting enough leads from the salesman. I said then look at other modes of getting orders. Pauleen said I don't have any problems. So Kirit how is the factory running? He said after you poached Krishna, I am finding it a little difficult in running the factory. I said I thought he did his work there, look for some other assistant. So, who is missing from today's meeting only Joy? Sunitha said she is on the way, should be reaching any time. I addressed Sunitha now are you looking after the software company? She said I told Joy to look after the development. I said now delegation is good but you have to keep a tight leash on their activities. If you have delegated the reins to Joy, you should call her to ask for the reports. How many orders are received and what they fulfilled and what are pending, that is management. If you leave everything to them they may not know what to do first and what to keep pending. You have to see what kind of complaints are received. You have to keep track of the complaints, if they are attending to the customer's satisfaction or not. You won't have time to look after each and every complaint, just check what is being done. If something is not to your satisfaction, you call a meeting and express your concerns. When did you have your last meeting? She said after you left us. So, after that, you are doing things as you see fit and letting them do their way. You take a meeting every week and discuss the goings-on and chalk out a plan for the next week. This way everyone is aware of what is going on. You are all partners in this venture and everyone has a responsibility to look after the company not just a share in the profits. With the rights come responsibilities. You all have to act as a single unit to run the company. Don't think your company or my company, it's every one of yours company. We depend on each other. Mahira depends on software for the orders. The software depends on the delivery of the hardware to complete their orders. Sahithi depends on Sunitha providing the leads. Sunitha depends on Sahithi to complete the orders so she will get more leads when the salesman go for selling and they get to show off completed works. We all depend on the staff to complete their work so we can move forward. So, it is all going in a cycle. Sahithi asked why are you talking like you will go away, did you not come here to stay. I said I have not got any specific instructions. I was told you have problems running the company I should go and attend to your concerns. I don't know how long I will be here. Or will I return if the problems persist if I go back?

Sunitha asked from where did you really come from? What were you doing at the time you came here? What were your connections there? I said you seem to have a lot of questions. I also have a lot of questions, if you can tell me what happened in my life here, I could answer your questions honestly. So, who has

the most knowledge of the story? Maybe who can tell me what happened before I came to Bombay? Sunitha said I could tell you that part in short. You were studying in Vijayawada in junior college and you have three friends Sreenu, Pradeep and Sneha. Sneha and you worked in your spare time at your grandfather's clinic and studied together and became close. When you came to Bombay after your second-year junior college, she was sent to her village and you joined the college in Hyderabad and waited a year and eloped with her to Hyderabad. You worked with your grandfather's brother and your grandfather until you completed your degree and came over to Bombay. I said some part of it I remember until Sneha was sent to her village. Then after coming to Bombay you started working with Kirit in his factory. I said from here each one tell me their personal stories rather than general story. So, I will have a correct idea of what happened and when. Now anyone can tell me about what happened with Sneha. Sunitha said you told me your story and I followed it up with you after her death. So Sneha was dead. I said let me know the story. Sunitha explained what happened at my sister's marriage, this part I heard from my sister also. Then Sahithi explained what is her part after that regarding me and her, how she helped me. Then Sunitha continued with Sneha's return and how she was sent to look after the hotel and how she met with a fire accident. And how we deduced about her death. Then Sahithi explained her part of the story. I said we will convene later to continue our discussions about the company. I would like each one of you privately to know their problems. I think I have a cabin here; can you direct me to my cabin. Sunitha said you have a room here and I will take you to your room. I said thanks to everybody, you may disperse, I will call everyone tomorrow to speak privately, ready with your complaints against me.

I got up and went with Sunitha to my room as she called it. I sat down on my seat and Sunitha sat in front of me. I said from the time I saw you at the hospital I felt a connection to you not only physical and also mental. I feel like you can read my mind and I can yours. I feel we were pretty intimate, am I correct. She said I entered into your life after the death of Sneha. That too after one and half years at your kid's birthday. I will go into how we met later, as you felt we were pretty intimate with each other. We took a flat near your factory and were spending my weekly off days. Then you saved me from the bomb blast and I lost my job because of that and you appointed me in your firm as operations director. So, what is your connection to me there in your life? I said we both studied in Vijayawada for our degree and you were a year junior to me and we knew each other from the time you joined our college. We were pretty intimate from that time and I made some blunders during the college days and I could recover myself from that and went over to Bombay and you joined me next year

in Bombay and we continued our relationship after some hiccups. Sunitha asked what kind of relationship we had there? I said I will speak honestly here, due to some mistakes I made to earn money, you broke up with me for over a year and you broke my marriage with Sahithi who was a with a daughter of 7 years, that is another story. We were about to get married and you went and told her about my mistakes you found out about in Vijayawada. Then they literally disappeared. Sunitha asked who disappeared. I said Sahithi and her family. Then I made you understand my mistakes and you forgave me, and we were together from that time. So, we were not married she asked? There is a problem there, you went and told your parents about my indiscretions during my degree. And they are still angry with me and you did nothing to explain to them and we did not have a chance of marriage until you cleared the misunderstandings with them, even though my mom likes you very much, and looks at you as her future daughter in law. Sunitha asked me what do you think about our stories here and there. I feel these are not dimensions or universes I felt about them previously. They are some kind of parallel times or timelines. Someone is manipulating us to see how these timelines run. They are saving people who are in my life like Sahithi and Leena. They know when they should be taken away or brought back. They act like God, but not. I recently interacted with one of them and he calls himself Bob. He is the one who told me to learn computer software and even supplied me with a computer to practise. So, they must be interested in transferring me from where I am, to cover for this Kumar. It seems they have not expected his death. And he must have died under suspicious circumstances. She said I only know about the circumstances of your death. I tried to save you by giving you first aid and you have just a scratch on your side and it did not penetrate any internal organs. Then we all were surprised how could you die? I spoke with Nandini on this matter and she got the post mortem report using her hospital connections. It was mentioned in the report that you died due to a heart attack and not due to injuries. That means something happened after you were injured or you were targeted previously. I thought if I were targeted how they could have done it? I have to get a full picture of the things in this house to know fully what happened. I got up and said come and I kissed her to know her reaction, she was passionate in her approach, I said I will speak to you later and we went to our house. She showed me my library and my bedroom and brought me to the dining room. We all sat down to dinner. Chitti came and put the dishes on the table. I asked who prepares this food? She said I prepare them with the help of a cook. I said to Chitti after dinner I would like to have a word with you. I finished the dinner in silence and went to the library and sat down. It seems to be my room in this house. I have everything I require here. I looked

at the books on the shelves. They are marked with a different genre. I looked at some books on science fiction. He must be researching these timelines. So many books on these topics. Sunitha came and said you had written a book before you went away. If you read it you might get an idea. I asked where can I find it. She said I got a copy of your book in inheritance, you might find it on the server if you know where to look for it. I said give me your copy I will read it and see. She said I printed what you had written, I will get the copy. You might find it easy to read. I said ok, get me. She went to her room and brought a bound book which was printed on a4 size paper and on a laser printer.

I took the book and started reading. It was written by this Kumar from his perspective. What events occurred in his life and what were his thoughts on them. I was reading until 1 after midnight. Then Sahithi came and stood at the door. I asked her why aren't you sleeping I was waiting for you to come, and dozed off and looked at the time and still you had not come back to bed. Are you feeling any shy about coming to bed even after our day in Hyderabad? I said nothing like that, why would I feel shy about my wife. She said from the intimacy we had in Hyderabad I understood you are the Kumar as I have known him from the time I met him. He had become more distant during the past few years. After Sneha's death, he was not the same Kumar I knew previously. Then when we had that coupling, you were the Kumar I knew at the time of the marriage. I said look at me I was the Kumar you knew before marriage, not the one after Sneha's death. My mind and body were refreshed to the time previous to the time before my sister's marriage. In your own words, you described me brilliantly. You go and lay on the bed I am just coming. She said if you are looking for your fags they are in the bottom drawer. I said thanks, can I smoke here? She said you normally smoke wandering the compound. Come let us make a round of the compound. I got up and went with her and when we were outside I lit the fag and we made a round of the house. She said see these gates is your idea. Then you got these barbed wires installed after the riots. Then the dogs came running and looked at me and smelled my feet and sat down in front of me. I said see they have recognized me and patted them on the head and they ran away. She said what I was telling, these gates you wanted to erect after we got the house beside our office. Then if you wanted to go to Loveleen's house, you had to go out and enter through the gate of her house. So, you asked to have these gates installed as security. You were very security conscience. You were always telling someone is watching this building. You have moved Loveleen to four places in two days for her to be not reached by newspaper and tv reporters. Finishing my fag, I threw it snubbed with my chappal. She said you were doing the same thing before also. I thought anyone

would do the same. I let us go and went to the library locked the book and came and lay on the bed and closed my eyes. Sahithi put her hand on my chest, I did not open my eyes and went to sleep.

I got up and went to the bathroom. Brushed and went in search of the kitchen. Chitti saw me asked do you want coffee anna. I said yes, she said you wait at the dining table I will get your coffee. When she brought coffee, I said thanks and started sipping. She looked at me and went away. I picked up the cup and walked to the library. Opened the door and picked up the book and started to read. I came up to Sneha's death. My eyes filled with moisture and I continued with how I met Sunitha and how our intimacy bloomed because of Sahithi's lack of interest. Then how I was hit by Loveleen and how I helped Sahithi using her and how I helped Loveleen in getting Guru discredited and how her father won the elections. Then I read about getting into the software. How I got the office building and announced I will start a software company and what risks I took to run the company. Sahithi came and informed me that she is heading to the office and I better have a bath and breakfast. I nodded my head. Then my intimate relations with Sunitha were clearly mentioned. That could be the reason the book was passed onto Sunitha. Then how Loveleen made me part of her plan to have a kid. I got up and went to the bathroom after locking the book. After the bath, I went over to the kitchen and saw the cook who is helping Chitti. I asked her how long she is working. She said one month. Chitti said she was recently appointed. I nodded my head. I don't want to say anything without a clear idea of what happened. After finishing breakfast, she put a teacup in front of me. I took the cup and reached the library. She must have waited for Sahithi to go away, Sunitha came into my room and was sitting on the chair. She asked me did you read it. I said I read it partially. What I thought we had pretty close intimate relations. I closed and locked the door and came and sat on the sofa. Sunitha came and sat beside me. After finishing our session, Sunitha said you have improved your technique. I thought you were incredible before, now you have a different approach and technique. I said I told you I had some problems during my degree, it is related to this only. She asked if you were experimenting with these styles. I nodded. She said it is not a mistake of me to get angry at you. She got up and said I have to get back to the office, see you at lunchtime. She opened the door and went away, closing the door behind her. I thought there is no physical relationship with Loveleen mentioned until now, why did I keep her away. She is a very beautiful looking woman, with a good figure. Then I flicked through the book and found what I was looking. It was the time I planned for the pan India matrimonial company how we had gone to the courier company and while returning how she sprained her ankle and how I

helped her into the house and then how I felt about her. Then how we both had our first intercourse and what happened next at Hyderabad. I left the story there and came back to where I was reading before. By the time I reached the Loveleen's story which I have already read, it was lunchtime and Sunitha came over to call me for lunch. I went and had lunch and came back and continued the story. Now the story with Nandini unfolded. I read until after meeting with Mr. Naidu and back to Bombay. I thought what was it with Nandini and me having intimate relations in 1987. Will I have such relations if I go back to my timeline? Then I continued reading the story. Then how the story unfolded for the fixing of the Nishitha and Ram's wedding which I already watched on video.

Then Chitti came with a cup of tea and placed it on the table. I told her to sit down. I asked her how is your life? She said everything good. How is Krishna with you? She said he is good with me, we don't have any problems. Once in a while, he takes me to Vakola. Everything is ok with me. He is getting his house rebuilt there. I said I have a concern about my health, previous to my death. She asked what happened, anna. I said someone had specifically targeted me. It would have a link to my smoking. They have specifically targeted my smoking and food. None of the others in the home smoke. Mahira smokes but never eats at our house like Sunitha or Joy, she only eats at parties. What do you think, you were always in the kitchen when food is prepared, do you have any insights? She said the cook from Loveleen's house was working with me before your death. She had left without informing anyone after your death. When you ask like that I recollect her cooking. She used a special salt when preparing the food. She used to say it is good for health. She could have targeted you with that salt. I said if you have any leftover salt in the kitchen get me a sample. She went over and returned she said there is no salt she used. I said she must have taken it with her. I said it's ok you can go, when the children come home send them to me. She said ok and went away. I sat thinking how Kumar managed to run the businesses here and how he had started to expand the business in other cities. Now I was reading about the events in the year 1994. In this year the hospital project was implemented in Nandini's hospital by himself. He had taken Loveleen with him. What is the purpose of his decisions? To keep Nandini away or to come closer to Loveleen. He had achieved both of the above, he kept Nandini away during implementation and he understood Loveleen's mind about investing in his ideas. Loveleen had invested in real estate in Hyderabad on his say so. Would she blindly believe him that he would not harm her in any way or does she trust him so much that she is ready to invest in anything he suggests, or does she know with those investments she can't lose anything? It must be a combination of all those things. If so, why she did not approach me except for

introducing me to Dhruv, she did not even try to connect with me, unlike others, except for the time when she saw and hugged and cried. That must be the reaction one has when they think one who is dead and comes back. Did she know or suspects that I am not the Kumar she trusts or had been intimate with? Does that prevent her from coming closer to me or is it, I don't know anything about her unlike Sunitha or Sahithi, who already approached me with their desires and I met them previously in my time? Or the problem is with me as I don't know anything about her in my timeline. Which is preventing me to get connected to her. Now unlike him, I am thinking of this as a timeline. He was thinking of this as an alternate universe or dimension. What is a change in the narration, because I met Bob, who had sent me here? I suppose they were to work in the background never coming in front of people. Then what has changed? The death of this Kumar. He was not supposed to die that day. Did this Kumar suspect something? They had to make me ready for coming over here. Bob was sent to prepare me, so I can come and interact with them. I have to complete reading this book to understand his mindset.

Why was I brought here, to solve these people's business problems? Then all they need is a business head for these companies. Why Kumar has not put someone as a head? Did he not find a suitable candidate or did he think they would run the companies as separate units, without infringing on others' territory? Then why did he make these companies depend on each other? It seems he had missed something somewhere. Maybe he expected his death but did not think this would come on him so fast. Or the people running these timelines have no idea of some third person or force put a binder in their works by killing him before time without a warning? I think they could not reverse the things that had already happened. Like bringing someone from dead. Now it is time to meet Loveleen privately. I looked at the number of the operator and asked to connect to Loveleen. I asked her can you come to my library? She said ok. I cut the call and waited for her to come in. I said close the door and lock it. She did so and came and sat down in a chair in front of me. I looked her over. Now she must be over 30 and fair and beautiful and I had to mention her figure here. She must be what they call the perfect figure of 36-24-36. The way she carries herself, if I had no idea about her I would have thought, she is a model or movie actress. The way she sits anyone would have thought she belongs to the royal family. Maybe the way she was brought up had something to do with it. But I could see a kind of sadness or suffering she must have endured in her eyes. Her eyes are gates to her heart. I think which would only open to a select few. I felt Guru had permanently closed it. That could be the reason it has taken this Kumar so long to get her to open them. She sat there and let me appraise her,

without flinching a little. I kept staring into her reading her thoughts and her past and everything about her in those eyes. Seeing me looking at her spellbound, she got up from the chair, still, I moved my eyes towards her face and kept them on her eyes. She came over to me pulled me from the chair and kissed me hard. Then I came out of the trance of looking at her. I looked at her eyes, now there is a fire in those eyes, the fire of lust, the fire of love and fire of everything this world is made of. I was transported to another world. When I came to conscience I was sleeping on the sofa in the library and no one was there in the room. I felt as if all the fire in me drained and I felt cold and shivering from that cold. I remembered what I read about Kumar touching her for the first time after returning from the business meeting. He felt so hot and even Sunitha could not put out the fire in him. Because I had not got any fire in me, I must have felt the way the fire has been drained and this shivering. I looked around and found a bottle of whiskey, it is not as good as my collection, but thought good enough and poured a stiff peg and drank it in a gulp. Then another peg and drank it. Now I sat down and let the whiskey to work its magic. It took me good five minutes to come to a normal being. The heat in me rose to the normal level and my shivering came down. I sat there drained of all the power. I have not felt this way after satisfying four girls. I thought about those days, now I feel stupid why I did all those things, for money? I did want money, but I did not do that for money. I was just carried away in the plan of Nimisha. Where would she be? Can I go and meet this timeline Nimisha? Maybe I will go and see Sneha's parents and let them meet their grandkids as Kumar hoped. Whom should I take with me to Vijayawada? Kids and Sahithi? Will they think she is responsible for Sneha's death? Then Nandini, could speak Telegu and convince them about Sneha's death. Or my parents, would they get angry at my parents and tell them you have given birth to this kind of son, who eloped with their daughter? Maybe I should take the kids and go alone. That should be good enough. I went to the hall and sat down on the sofa. When the children came from school they all came running to me. It is Dhruv who is in the front. I caught him put him beside me and told them to sit. They sat down on the side sofa. I told them your father, stopped for a second and said your old me wanted you to meet your mother's parents. I meant your mother Sneha. They last saw you when you were just 6 months. Then your mother died and we never visited them and they never visited us. I was thinking of taking you to them probably visit Durga temple on the hill. You know we watched the temple from our home daily. Then another side there is a Gandhi hill with his memorial stupa and planetarium. So, what do you think of visiting? They said aye, we will be going on a tour with dad. I felt I have abandoned the kids due to the work pressures. It

seems I have not taken them anywhere. I called Sunitha asked to book us 3 tickets to go and visit Vijayawada. I called Sreenu and asked him to book us a car and send it to us at the airport.

We three of us went by flight, got down at the Gunnavaram airport. We came out of the airport and looked around for the car. A man in a driver's dress was standing with a board with Welcome Mr. Kumar. We went over to him and first went and visited Durga temple and offered Kumkum puja to the Devi and then went over to Sreenu. I introduced the kids to him, his brothers and Pradeep. Pradeep's family stays somewhere else and Sreenu's stays above their typing institute. He took them and introduced his wife and sisters in law. I noticed she is not Jamuna. Then we went with Sreenu to Sneha's house to see her parents. I asked for forgiveness for what happened to Sneha. I profusely told them sorry and seeing the grown-up kids they caught them and kissed them. From all the kissing they must have felt a little uneasy. She has invited us for the lunch. Which we had and I invited them to Bombay to visit the kids again. I gave my card and explained our businesses and the kids explained where we stay and the things like how their aayi or mother looks after them. And also, about their aunts who stay with us. I let them speak with the kids, came into the balcony and lit a fag and smoked. Seeing me smoking Sneha's father was about to come out instead went inside. I threw the fag and then he came outside. I said sorry a force of habit. Seeing feeling apologetic he said don't be sorry for everything. We don't know you as Sneha does. She believed in you and came with you on her own. It was the foolishness of our father and father in law to think that you had brought disrespect to our family. We know how you were with Sneha in Bombay. How hard you worked to get money and how you looked after her. We wanted you to live your lives. It was my father in law's idea to kidnap her at your sister's marriage. Instead, she came willingly with Suresh. Rest you know and what happened at Bombay you told us. We are sorry to lose one of the daughters, but if she is taken by god so early what can we do.

Then a thought struck me. Is it the work of Bob's gang to take away Sneha? What is their play in all this? He must have thought my thinking, that I am thinking about Sneha, seeing my moist eyes, he said we all miss Sneha, it must be hard for you. To raise two children without their mother. How did you raise them with your wife also working? I said my mother got a girl from the village, she is my long-lost uncle's daughter. She was brought with the promise of marrying her. Now she is married and living with us with her husband. Her husband is in a good position with our company. My only regret is Sneha went away without enjoying all this. He showed his forehead and said we all come

here with fate written there. I concurred with him. Mother in law called us to have tea. After tea, we took leave and left for the airport. I took a promise from them to come to Bombay and I will arrange tickets for them. We reached Bombay and reached home with the kids. I thought one of his wishes I fulfilled.

I sat on the sofa and asked where is Joy, I have not seen her. Sunitha said she was supposed to come yesterday night. I will check with the airport if she had flown or not. Then a thought struck me did Joy have anything to do with my death. Is she acting all fearing when her husband came at her with the knife? Did she arrange all that, but for what? I have been cordial with her, I had given her position and salary and shares, why would she do that, if she did that? What hidden agenda does she have? Had she been threatened by anyone to do that? Did she do that under duress? But who could have made her to do that? Loveleen's father's opposition? Would they think they would take my help in their next election? That is the reason software has been destroyed in the server. And where is my personal laptop? Or it was the disgruntled Sena members, who were against me from the start and who has put all the blame on me for their loss. Or is there someone else who is running all this in the background? Sunitha came and said I have confirmed that she was on that flight and she landed in Bombay and collected her baggage from the conveyor belt. The airline has confirmed that. Shall I make a complaint to the police? I said not yet, let us wait and see. She must have got some emergency when she landed and instead of coming here must have gone somewhere else. She said do you think so? I said I don't think it could be a possibility. Where does she stay when in Bombay? Sunitha replied she used to stay here in the bungalow only. Previous to that she was staying in Sahithi's house. I said you better enquire with her parents about her. She said I will check with them and lifted the phone and called a number. These phones are different from what we had. We used to have dialling phones. We have to turn around the dial with holes marking 1 to 9 and 0. These have push buttons with numbers marking. I am going to learn a lot from my future. If I go back can I use them in my time? Maybe develop software from what I learn here. What would be other Kumars must be doing. One I know is dhobi baba, who works as a pujari who is also called Swamy. Why did they send Leena back to me? I know about this Kumar who is a businessman, I would say from these buildings, he was a good businessman. Would I rise to his level? If I have some of his intelligence I am sure if not this much maybe half of this wealth I could amass. Then Sunitha's parents may come running to give her daughter to me. What would I lose if it takes another four or five years? Sunitha is with me, here or there. She must be scared to take back her words? Did she learn more than she letting me on? Did she already spoke with that girl? That's

why when I said I had not raped that girl, she believed me. Did she forgive me for her role in cancelling my marriage with Sahithi and making Leena without a mom? Now how many Leena's were? One is with me and the Leena who stayed and went away to her mother as claimed this Kumar is a different one. From the story, I read, that Kumar was staying with his parents and married Sahithi and their first child is Leena, who was kidnapped and taken to a village and when her guardians were returning to Bombay met with an accident or when they were brought here met with an accident. So, if I think from the perspective of the people who are running this show, the guardians must have died and seeing, she will not have anyone to look after her, she was brought to this Kumar. He has written he was having a kind of panic attack when she landed in Bombay at that time. What could it mean. He was always writing he was having some kind of visions and premonitions. Where did he get them and why I am not getting them? So, they must have started after Sneha's death. Where she would be my Sneha? She would have been married by her family. I did not attempt to meet after the whack on my ear. Maybe I have not loved her that much to take a risk. Now the Pujari Kumar had eloped with her to some village and staying with her from the story Sahithi told me. From what Leena told me even though he is just a pujari in a temple in a small village they have everything in their house, even ac. Which pujari has ac in their house? She also mentioned that he was away for a long time from home and would come in once in a while. What is he doing away from home, earning that money which brings luxurious ac? It seems we Kumars can't sit idle and not earn big money. Then there is this Leena's mother Sahithi. If Sahithi is there, there should be another Kumar. What is he like? It seems he was staying with our father and mother in the Wadala Quarters. My parents were about to shift there, they have already got an allotment and my mother told me when you return you will have your own room. But you have to come to Wadala. Now, his parents are also living in Wadala, from the story this Kumar never lived there. That he explained when he got the visions of riots after the Babri masjid incident, he could not recognize the areas they have happened even though they happened in front of their house in Wadala. Can I do something in this regard about Babri Masjid's demolition and riots and bomb blast, if I ever return back? I don't think so, they may wipe my memories of this time and send me back. Maybe this Kumar's memories were wiped and placed in this timeline. That could be the reason for his memories and premonitions. It is uncanny how this Kumar not only saved himself from the bomb blasts also saved this Sunitha. Am I going in the right direction in this matter? Do these memories have something to do with his death? Did he remember something, so they had to eliminate him and look for an alternate Kumar me? They could

not bring Pujari Kumar, he went in a different direction, marrying Sneha, becoming god fearing person, if not fearing at least serving the god. So, he may not fit the bill to replace this Kumar. Whereas I have some business sense. Also, know how to manage people and understand their weak points and use them for my gain. They must have thought I could be their ideal person to replace this Kumar. From the way I handled the meeting on the first day, I must have some knowledge of what is going on. Otherwise, why would I have blasted Mahira for keeping the bungalows empty to do modifications instead of letting the producers do them and collecting extra rent for doing such modifications? How did I know what were these bungalows meant to be? Did they plant a general idea of how these companies work before sending me here? So, how many Kumar's details I have come across? One is me, the second one is the dead one, third one is Pujari and fourth one is I assumed from this Leena's conversations and what this Kumar deduced. If I count four how many more could be there, without any direct connections to our lives.

Could it be these kinds of thoughts have killed this Kumar, maybe I should refrain from all these thoughts about timelines?

Sunitha came back saying Joy's parents also don't have any idea of her whereabouts. When thinking about Joy, Leena mentioned Pujari bringing an aunty called Joy to their house and leaving her there and going away. Did they send her to Pujari's timeline to save her from something, like my anger? I called Sunitha, for the time being, forget about Joy think about other works. Sunitha quizzed me do you know perhaps where she went. I said I don't know at this moment, I suspect some thing like Leena going away could have happened. She exclaimed like Leena, Joy could have gone into another dimension? But why? I said I feel she has a hand in the death of my former self. She asked do you think it is not a heart attack like it was mentioned in the report, might be murder? Sunitha asked but why Joy would do that? She always said she loves you, not the kind of love I have for you but platonic love for saving her life and giving her life after that. I said maybe someone made her do it? She is scared of her husband. Someone must have scared her that they would return her to her husband, something like that. She said when you are saying like that there is a point in that. We don't know anyone until they do something like this. So, it could be she is hiding after reaching Bombay. Shall we inform the police? I said we should take the help of Mr. Deshpande. She exclaimed Deshpande, who is he? I said he is the Vakola Shakha Pramukh. She said I know you always referred to him as Shakha Pramukh. I said me and Sahithi went to him recently to complain. I will tell you about a funny incident. One day Sahithi kissed me when

I dropped at her house? Sunitha asked she kissed you? I said only on cheeks, then this boy Suresh must have seen her doing that. The next day when I went to meet her he brandished a knife and came at me threateningly. I remembered the whack Sneha's brother gave and gave him one myself. He caught his ear and sat down, his family came and took him away. Sahithi advised me we should go and complain to Shakha Pramukh, we went and complained and he called him and was asking her about his behaviour. He was shouting she kissed him. He asked me what kind of boy are you and was asking me my details and I was telling him my details, he knows my father and he was asking why are you kissing her. Suresh is shouting it is not him, she kissed him and Sahithi made an innocent face and said why would I kiss this boy, he came to drop me at the house, I turned to him and said bye and went inside. So, Mr. Deshpande had admonished him and if he does any of this goondagiri, he will put him in jail personally. I think he is the same person who had kidnapped Leena from her house when she is a year old. When we came back from there, the next day Sahithi arranged for a flat and we went and enjoyed ourselves. Sunitha said you read the story, she was complaining that he did not touch her until marriage even though she was ready to give him pleasure. Now the story about my Leena. Apparently, with our coupling that day she became pregnant and I was away on a business trip to Vizag. Now when she found out she was pregnant and she did not know what to do? She was thinking about what her parents would do if she informs them she is pregnant. A jeep came in front of her. She closed her eyes and thought now I could never lay my eyes on Kumar. Then she was in Dadar railway station in front of Kumar who wears dhoti with Sneha having a month old Atul. Sunitha asked only Atul and no Reena? I said It appears so, he had come to visit his parents after being away for a long time after eloping with Sneha. So, he took Sahithi to his house, she was scared to go home so, he took her to her house finding that it was locked and her parents have gone abroad. Now, what year would that be? 1984, she was pregnant in 1982. She went into the future and not only to the future she went into another timeline. What he can do, so he took her to his village and kept her in his house until she gave birth to Leena. After naming her Leena on the 21st day she returned to her house and she only missed a few hours of her timeline. Sunitha asked did she return with Leena? I said no, Leena stayed back with Pujari Kumar and Sneha raised her with Atul. Sunitha asked you said Leena is with you so when did she come back? I said when I was coming to Bombay with my Sunitha I caught her in Dadar station and she recognized me and asked me where is my dhoti. Now I understood and asked her name, she said Leena. What do you think her age at that time? Sunitha said if you have got her back after a year,

around a year. I said no, she is seven or eight years old. Not even a year after her birth and she was returned to us as seven years old. Sunitha asked so, what did you do. I said what can I do, I let my Sunitha go to her house and I took Leena to my house. She asked did you tell your Sunitha that she is your daughter? I said how can I tell her that? I told her she is Sahithi's daughter, which is true. Then I took her to Sahithi in the evening and brought her back to our house and asked my mom to look after her until I find her parents. I went on business and returned and said they were not reachable and I would be looking after her after my studies were completed, until then asked her to look after her. I completed my studies and went to Bombay and you, that is my Sunitha stayed back to Vijayawada to complete her studies. Then she got some misunderstanding and broke off with me. Then, I when I could not reconcile with Sunitha, I agreed to be married to Sahithi. Our wedding date was fixed and just before one-week Sunitha went and spoke to Sahithi and her parents broke off our wedding and she was sent her away, now they are also not reachable. Sunitha asked so you preferred me over Sahithi to marry? I said it is not like that with Sahithi, she forced herself on me by getting a flat to spend the time. It was the other way with my Sunitha. She asked what do you mean? I said I planned for us to go in the first-class coupe to Bombay. She said it was your idea to have us together and that is why you were giving me preference over her. It is like this, my Sunitha, I loved her from the time I saw her at her house. I followed her and found out about her and she was my childhood friend also. Our families know each other for a long time even though we were not relatives. Then I wanted to have her to myself only so I planned that. With Sahithi I felt like a one-night stand. I have agreed to marry her only because she was my daughter's mother and that marriage was cancelled due to my Sunitha's anger. She said so now you are closer to Sunitha and Sahithi is missing. How close are you to her? I said we spend every Saturday evening and Sunday together. She asked did she not ask you to marry? I said now, she says what she had said to her parents, she can't take back and they heard a lot from her uncle too. She resigned to life with no marriage with me. I did not think I should mention Anjali here, what that would bring? But her next question put me in a quandary. She asked how many girlfriends do you have? I don't want to lie to her as she seems to read me. I said I have one more girlfriend, I befriended on my boss's challenge. What is the challenge she asked? We went to a client to close a deal he was following for a long time and the client is not giving time. He took me to the company and we waited for half an hour and still no call from the client. I said to him let us go he is not the type to close the deal. Now his PA thought she would not see me again went in and got the call for us to meet him. We closed

the deal and when we came out my boss asked how did you do that? I said I have read her and she must have done that so we will come back, I gave the impression we may not return and she went in and got us the appointment. So, he challenged me if you think you can do that, why don't you date the girl and show me. I asked him how much time you will give me. He said take whatever time you need. Then I went to her the next day and gave her the letter from our office and went in the evening waited for her with my car. Sunitha said you had a car also? I said I maintain a bike which I purchased when I saw Sunitha and I used to take her to the college and then for work purposes I purchased a car after coming to Bombay. I acted as if I am getting in the car and looked at her and smiled. She smiled back and asked lift and I told her to sit in the car and took her to my office first, I told her to wait in the car, then told her why to wait here, come and sit and I will return in a minute. So, I sat her in the customer waiting place and went to the manager, seeing her he asked me what are you doing with her. I said I might take her to a restaurant and then I will see. I asked him about the challenge we made, he said as per the challenge I will take you as Marketing Executive. Sunitha asked so, what were you doing before that? I said I worked there as a courier boy. She asked as a courier boy doing deliveries? I said yes, and he made me a marketing executive. From then on, he would take me to close the deals with the clients. So, if your Sunitha broke up with you and your wedding got cancelled, how did you two come together, Sunitha asked? Before all this happened with the girl, when I was doing deliveries, I got a flat near Sunitha's house and watched her for some time and when her parents went to Madras I went to her house and I asked her why did she break off with me. She said their neighbour's daughter reported to the neighbour that I had raped their daughter by blackmailing her. I asked her why would I rape any girl she must have lied to you. Then I scolded her because of her Leena had become motherless. And she went over to her to speak to Sahithi's parents and they already left. Then she said she wants to say sorry to my mother. She came to my house and said sorry for what happened, it was all a misunderstanding. She had dinner at our house and we returned to our flat and she stayed there for three days with me as her parents are in Madras. Sunitha asked did Sunitha knows about the other girl. I said her name is Anjali. Now Anjali went to her parents and spoke about me and asked their permission to marry me. Then they must have asked to meet me. She said in the guise of a function at her place she called me to her house. Seeing me younger than their daughter her father made fun of me and I got angry told him if I had known what she was calling me for, I would not have come to their house. Sunitha what is her age? I said I thought it would 24, I never asked her age, but I told him I am 21 and I have a job of a

Marketing Executive, I have a bank balance and a car and bike a flat at Andheri. That's when he laughed at my age. So, I came back to my house. Then next day she rang me up to apologize, before she could say anything I asked her to come to a restaurant and took her to my house for a party. While we were having the party Sunitha walked and asked who is this. Anju said I am his cousin. Seeing her elder to me she sat down to the party and we three emptied the bottle and they literally raped me afterwards. From then on we made it a routine to meet on Saturday evening have a party, then a threesome and next morning a bath together and spend the whole Sunday enjoying ourselves. So, none of them raised the topic of marriage asked Sunitha?. I told Sunitha can't tell her parents about me, then Anju's parents have rejected me. They don't want to go against their parents. I could have married Sunitha without her parent's knowledge, but what am I now 22, I have some time to decide when to marry. Sunitha is not going to run away from me. What am I going to lose? Instead of staying together seeing each other daily, we meet once in a week, have fun and wait for the next week, in anticipation of great fun among the three of us. Sunitha asked they don't feel jealous of each other. I said I don't think so, they would think of it as a kind of competition, who would outperform each other. They take it as a compliment than a competition. They feel they bring each other's best out. She asked how do you know what they think? I said knowing me you are asking this question. She said yes, you can read minds, especially mine. She said hearing all this made me hot. I said I don't think there is a place we can go now? She said there is a trick, you lock the library door and slip through the French windows and come to my room through the French window in to my room. I will go to my room and open the French windows. It will be easier for you. I said ok, and let her go out and locked the door and slipped through the French windows into a kind of ledge running through the house. It is wide enough to walk easily and I found a French door opened and slipped in. It must be Sunitha's room. I looked around and said you have a good room here. At first, Sahithi told me she would give me a small room with a single cot bed, so we can't share the bed. Then you forced her to allot a bigger room. After shifting to this bungalow, she gave me this room. I sat on the bed and completed our coupling and I returned to my library and closed the French door and sat down. She came to the front and knocked and I opened the door. I said I know all this but I did not know your room, and I want you to invite me there. She said badmash.

She asked that's all your story? I said I have not told you about Bob. I got an offer from a rival company as we are poaching their client by hook or by crook. So, they were trying to get me to join their company. I don't have any intentions of shifting to another company. So, one day a girl asked for a lift outside the

gate of our office. I asked where are you going? She said Andheri west. I told her to hop in and she sat down and then she stopped at a restaurant and told me to wait and came back with another girl. Both got down outside our apartment block. I went in and called Sahithi to come to my room. She in turn called Anju. Then after a few minutes, those two girls turned outside my door. I invited them and they were waiting for their boss. By this time Sahithi and Anjali came to my room as if we have a date. So, when he did not turn up the first girl went in search of their boss and then both of them came. By the time I asked the second girl what is the problem. She said he wants to offer me a job. I said I don't want a job, because I want to shift to a business and I am looking for something to do. She told him that, he went away saying he will call back. He called me the next day and told me to start learning software programming. I said I don't know anything about software. He asked me to get some books and study it is going to be the rage in the future. I went and brought the books and studied and next week he gave me a computer to practise. When I could do some programs, he called me and said there is a job for you. I told him I don't want a job, I want to do business. He told me I am giving you an opportunity to do that only. There is a big company and he wants me to replace a dead man and look after their business. I asked him how could I do that? He said you look like him only, only a little younger, it won't be a problem.

So, from 1986 my timeline, I came to 2000 to your timeline. The person who offered me this is Bob.

Sunitha asked when Anju's father asked you, you said you had a bank balance and where did you get it. As per these stories at the time of completing your junior college, you did not have a rupee to yourself. Then during your degree college days, you had earned all that money? I said at the beginning I was doing home deliveries, then I brought a cycle and my income increased and then I brought a scooter and appointed an assistant to deliver on cycle and he would do all the deliveries during my holidays. Then I started giving a loan to a house owner and he sold me the house after I paid him off completely and I got it written to my name. This I sold it to my grandfather's brother who wanted to use it for godown. This money I put in the bank. Sunitha asked so you did all that by doing home deliveries. I said not only that I started doing side business also. What were you doing? I used to buy foreign liquor and cigarettes and things like that are not available freely to people or people who don't want to go to the shop and purchase them. I used to supply them on phone orders.

Sunitha said one thing I could not understand is the accusation of rape of that girl. I am not the type to blame you without knowing the truth. I would have

gone to the root of that and found out what happened, I would not blame you just like that. You are hiding something here. I said I can't hide anything from you. She said if it is not the case then it must be consensual sex. That's why Sunitha could not go to her family to explain your indiscretions. She knew the truth and still forgave you but she cannot go to her parents with the truth. It must be worse than the rape. Tell me what did you do, which she could not tell her parents. I lowered my head and looked at the floor. She said what is the word and tapped her head and said, Gigolo. You were acting as a gigolo and that is why she could not tell her parents, am I correct? I nodded my head looking at the floor. Why are you hiding your face, when you did that acts did you not feel ashamed? Why do you need that kind of money? I said I was carried away by their acts. I did not do that for money. It is just a thrill. I was just 17 at that time. So many girls were coming to me then at the time I was addicted to three things, drinks, smoking and sex. Unknowingly I got into all that. But when I met Sunitha, I left everything behind, sold off my businesses and house and shifted to Bombay. I did not even stay back for Sunitha who is in the final year then. I went to Bombay in search of a job, when I could not find anything, then I joined as a courier boy and did deliveries on my bike. Then I brought a car for getting more income. They would pay more mileage for using a car. You have to understand my love for Sunitha only saved me from the ordeal. If she had not come to my life I would have become a drunkard and a maniac begging on the side of the road when they all left me to my fate. She has really saved me. That is why when I went to explain to her and if she did not listen to me, I thought I would marry her forcefully, but returned without doing anything to her. I went to her so angry, I might have raped her if she did not forgive me then and she went in search of Sahithi. Sunitha said I know you would not have done that. You are not that kind of man, what do you think about all this?

I said from what I could gather and from my personal experiences and what I read from Kumar's book, I have come across another three Kumars and that includes Snehas, Sunithas, etc. from looking at all this from a scientific perspective is that someone doing experiments on time travel and timelines and things like that. Sunitha asked why do you think that? From all these things like Sneha studied with Kumar as I have. She was sent away like in my life. Also, in Pujari's life, from the story, Sahithi heard and told me about them. So, we know three of the Kumars have studied together with Sneha and every time she was sent away to her grandfather's place. The three of them reacted differently about that. This Kumar waited one year and eloped with her. Pujari saw her come to visit her and eloped with her and went to a village and became a pujari. Then I went to see her, got a whack on my ear and I went in a different way. I

don't know much about the fourth Kumar and what I understood from Kumar's deductions, he would have forgotten and gone to Bombay to do his degree and stayed with his parents. Now, from all this, the change of story is occurring after Sneha was sent away to her grandfather's place. So, it must be the time when time is split or timelines were created for us. I also feel someone is monitoring because they were acting on those times where ever necessary. This can be found in saving Sahithi from the jeep and taking her and leaving her in the hands of Pujari to look after until she gives birth. The same thing with Leena, she was returned to me when I was with Sunitha and they must have the confidence or wants to see how I will deal with her. This Leena was brought here when her guardians are dead and she was brought to this Kumar. Sunitha asked then why they did not save this Sneha from the fire accident? I think there can be two reasons. One it is their own doing that she died in an accident. They wanted to see how he will react to her death. Or they were not watching her and it was very late for them to act. Another thing that they don't want to save Sneha as they want to introduce you into his life. They were not satisfied with that also and introduced Loveleen, who he used for helping Sahithi. Then she helped herself in two ways, one to get impregnated with Dhruv and to take revenge on Guru, which he had done willingly. Then he helped her father win the elections. Then Loveleen started to invest with him her money, which he used judiciously and took all of you as partners. From what I have read he was worried about his partners money, what will he do if he can't recover your investments. From his memoir, you were his favourite person as was mine. He always thought about you when you were here and when he went away he used to plan for your return. He had suffered a lot when you went over to Air India, and you had to travel all over the world. He did not restrict you, he would let you do whatever you wanted. He would think you will return back to him, that confidence he had. The only thing which was funny was the incident with Mahira and you going and complaining to Sahithi. Then a thought struck me, what is Sahithi's role in all this. Why did she stay silent all this time? I asked Sunitha how was Sahithi after that incident when you went to her to complain. She was angry at me at first and she would avoid me if she could and I would avoid her. Then after I started working as operations manager she would be just cordial and let Nishitha handle our interactions about the leads for her firm. It seems she has not forgiven me for being close with Kumar. After I came to live at this house, she would come to my room first to check you out. Once you were having a drink. The second time you slipped out of the French windows. Then you started using the trick to lock the library and come to my room and would slip back and unlock the door. She used to show her high handedness that she was your wife.

I said I still couldn't understand her problem. She was always moody and would not respond in bed, then her whole personality changed. He thought her work is the problem, he got her job with Loveleen. Then she was normal for some time. Then he thought she was feeling guilty for Sneha's death. Finding the truth about her did not help out. Then he got her to a psychiatrist, the medicines did not help, she thought he is drugging her to go to see you and would miss the medicines. Then he thought that she is affected by Leena's mother's moods about her daughter missing. Then he told her Leena is her daughter only from the future. That has reduced her mood swings and she used that for having sex with him only. Do you think she has the nerve to try to kill him or would feed him some medicine to reduce his lust which could have had a negative effect on him? Sunitha said that could be a possibility, I never thought about it. It is like if I can't have him no one else should have him or it could be I only should have him. I said I also smoke but in limited quantity, but he seems to be in constant alertness for which he used to smoke. Sunitha said yes, I have seen him smoke and make rounds of the buildings. He would be looking everywhere as if someone is watching. He became very sensitive about security also. He would check with the watchman regularly who was coming to the houses. He even thought of installing cameras around the houses. He must have the conscience about the people running these timelines. It must have started sometime after Sneha's death or when Leena entered into his life. He was very disturbed by her when she was found by the Sena people. He did not get relief until she was brought to his house. Or it could be the time the Sena sent him that 10lakhs cheque. When he got his first premonition about the riots. These two are the main turning points in his life premonition wise.

Sahithi came over and called to come to sleep. I looked at the time it was after 11:30 pm. I got up and said goodnight to Sunitha and went behind her to her bedroom.

Chapter 2

Kumar

I completed reading Kumar's memoir and started to deal with the problems of the organization. First, I called each of the developers to my room and from the notes prepared by Pauleen gave them pointers or try to solve the problems. First, I called Rajesh and advised him that respect has to be earned it can't be demanded. If you give them the respect they deserve they will respect you back. Everyone has some type of feeling about the opposite person, you find that and act accordingly. Your work should show the path, not your pride.

The Next one has problems with complaints from the clients about bugs in the software. I told him I used to look for the bugs from the final product not at the time of development. You should have a set of guidelines for debugging the software before releasing it into the market. Don't depend on others for finding the bugs, check yourself thoroughly. Put one person for testing and get it thoroughly tested before finalizing the software. Then others I called and answered as per their queries.

Next for the partner's queries, I called a board meeting to discuss the problems faced by the companies.

I told them the main problem you are facing is that you were given independent charges for your line of work or the company you are running. Now Sahithi is running Loveleen's interior decoration firm. Sunitha looking after the software development firms sitting here. Then Mahira looks after the Kid's firm as MD.

Now Loveleen is looking after the branches company as Chairman. Now the problem is that you don't have a Head of the companies as I was looking after the companies. You can work and look after the companies you are managing. The problem arises because all the companies are dependent on each other. The structure of the companies is made this way after the hit and miss way of management I had put in place. I was not a management expert when I started these companies. I was hardly a software developer. My main strength was debugging. It is not that I don't know how to program, I have not studied to be a software developer like many of your developers. I am a commerce graduate and had some business acumen running a small business and then when I came to Bombay, Kirit found me and offered a job in his factory seeing my business acumen. I had worked for him very hard putting in long hours to run the factory. Then I was thinking about earning and saving the money to buy a house. When

my wife Sneha went away I lost interest in life and as many of you know, Sahithi brought me from the brink of self-destruction and made me a man and gave a roof over my head and a place where I can feel I belong. Then we married and my first wife Sneha returned with kids. Then our life turned a notch and, in an accident, my wife Sneha died. Leaving two small kids for us to look after. One day I had an idea which I put on paper only to find it unintelligible to me and we were wondering what is it, then a passer-by looked at that asked me to help him out. For his help, he had given us the software we loaded in a system we brought. Then I left the work to Kirit and started to concentrate on programming and used it for helping Loveleen's father in elections. Then we could start the software company and other companies, of which all of you are aware. Now you may ask why do we need so many companies and why so much interlinking between companies. At first, I let everyone work in their own way. What I found is that without supervision people can't function. For example, Mahira was working as a marketing executive and I assumed she knew about marketing the software. But she failed to understand the market is not expanded as she expected. Then Sunitha came in our company as operations director and I groomed her and gave her many portfolios, which she could handle with my guidance. So now what should I do with Mahira, who is a marketing director, she was not into marketing like I thought she would do, so I thought of tax purposes and to safeguard the children's future decided to put all the bungalows in a trust company and added some capital to run business and handed it to Mahira as MD, where she failed in marketing, she took up the job of MD brilliantly and she could handle that firm successfully.

Slowly others have joined and I provided them with suitable posts. And we started to expand the businesses to other cities. You might ask why the branches were set up as a separate company. There are two reasons for that, one is tax purposes and second is all the investment in these branches was put up by Loveleen. We have not used our firm's finances for the setting up of branches. So, they all have their own office spaces of buildings. It works two ways, we are investing in real estate where we could expect to get good returns. By running the firms in our own places, we could cut costs. Because of the capital share I had to put Loveleen as the head of the company. Now the businesses between the companies run both ways. For the products we own here they pay us licensing fees for installing there. There will be hardware sales going over to the firm Mahira is running and we are dependent on each other for survival which it seems you all have forgotten. So, from this moment I am appointing Loveleen as the overall head of the companies. She will overlook all the companies and all the heads of the companies will report to Loveleen.

Sahithi asked what are you going to do? I said I came here as an independent observer only. Now I will be observing the activities of the companies and especially how Loveleen is working as the Head of the business. I will not intervene in the activities of any of the firm's activities. If I have any concerns I will only speak with Loveleen and if anyone of you have a problem you have to approach her directly. If and only if she requires any help, then I will advise her on those matters. Am I clear?

I looked around for their reaction. All of them must be thinking about what would be the outcome of Loveleen's appointment.

I only told them the story of my life previous to the setting up of the companies is that I want to show them I remembered everything. If I have not read Kumar's memoir I would not have much knowledge about the circumstances. But after reading the full story, I know him as much as I know myself. Also speaking with Sunitha has brought a new perspective to the whole life of this Kumar. From the story, I could understand he is trying to put Loveleen as the head. He might have thought about announcing on the night of the party. That is why I thought why did he not appoint anyone, after reading his story, he was grooming her for some time to take over the companies. As she is the majority shareholder there is no other person than her to take over the company.

Mahira asked why Loveleen and not someone else. I said because she is the majority shareholder and she was investing in the business without having second thoughts. It was her investments that we could expand like this in the south. Because I have seen that you not coordinating with each other, I had to come up with the idea to appoint a head to oversee the operations of all the companies and branches. If anyone has any concerns they can voice them now or take your time and voice your concerns in the next board meeting. Someone asked when will be the next board meeting. As I said if you had any concerns, then give them in writing and call for a board meeting. We will see if the concern requires a board meeting or a simple solution would be enough. If there is no further agenda we will close the meeting here. I sat back on my chair and watched every one congratulates Loveleen and leave the cabin. I looked at Pauleen to give me a copy as soon as possible.

At last me and Loveleen left in the cabin. She said did you thought about announcing me as the Head at the 31st Party? I said it seems so. Did you inform about your decision to anyone? I said I could not recollect that. She said so anyone with the information could have killed you then. I said it is possible, let us go to my room. Instead, we went to Loveleen's room. I told her to sit in her

chair and sat in front of her. I said I feel my work here has been completed, I might be called back any time. Don't think you are alone here. Think I am sitting in this chair in front of you. Think what advice I would give to your problem and that would work out for you, don't think I am abandoning you, I will keep a look on you from where ever I am going, I might come back if you are in any kind of problem you cannot attend to. I will sit with you until my call comes. I saw tears roll from her eyes. I never saw her like that, she always kept an iron exterior under all the circumstances. I said I can't give you any advice on how to run your personal life, you think about yourself and about Dhruv and take necessary decisions. She got up and came over to me. I thought she is expecting a final coupling with me. I got up and looked into her eyes. I saw lust in her eyes and kissed her and turned and locked the door and came back to her. She took me to the edge of the world and back. Sex with her is a unique experience, I don't think I will have that kind of experience with anyone else. I don't know for such a long time how he could have kept her away.

Chapter 3

Kumar

It is been a week since our board meeting and things were coming to normal as before my death. I thought any day I would get a call from Bob to return to my timeline. I was waiting for the weekly encounter with My Sunitha and Anju.

For the time being, I tried to spend with the children whatever time I could give them, it was the other way whatever time they could give me. I would take them to the beach or to get ice cream in the night or walk in the compound. As I don't smoke as much as this Kumar I would abstain from smoking in front of them. Children would be happy they could spend with their daddy more time than they could previously. I used to tell them the stories of my childhood, how we would enjoy the time even though we had little in toys or games. I showed them to play with marbles and tops and small things we used to make items to play. Time is running and Joy has not returned or not found. We tried everything to find her even lodged a police complaint. I had a feeling she is the key to the death of this Kumar until that mystery is solved I might have to remain here.

Sahithi

Why did he have to go and appoint Loveleen as the head of the business? What difference would that make for me? She would be my boss at her company, even if she is chosen as a business head for all the companies, what will I lose. What I don't understand is why did he do that? Because of her investments with the company or does he have any other relationship with her. I don't think she would let him come near her. But the way she was crying when she saw him after his coming back, I may need to think otherwise. I know he has a relationship with Sunitha, which she herself accepted in front of me. But I have seen him after his return, he was not that close to her, I saw him discuss things with her, but he would not slip away to her room as he was doing. Does that mean he has changed man or what I would describe the man he was before she met him? If I understand when they started their affair, I can come to a conclusion as to why he was not interested as before. Maybe it was she, who pulled him into her viles. But I could not come to a conclusion about his relationship with Loveleen. She was close to him emotionally, which I could see when he tried to help her multiple times. At one time he let her come close to his brother also. She had in return helped him financially. I heard some rumours going in the office. Loveleen was in Bangalore and she was pregnant. Both of them were incorrect. She was in Madras for the last six months setting up her

firm. And she does not seem pregnant. She does not look like she would let anyone come near her physically. Once Kumar said how her husband, Guru treated her and she got scared about men from that time. All her staff at the office are women only. She would only get men on a contract basis. According to what Kumar said it seems correct, she would not let any man come close to her let alone have a child with such a man.

How long will Kumar stay with us? With the way he appointed Loveleen as business head, he thinks he may not stay long with us. Exactly where did he come from? Did God really send him to help us out? Did we hear anywhere that a dead man would return to his family to help? If not, who is he? Did he create a clone of him and kept him somewhere, where he would come out after such an event like his death? If so, why did his memories stop in 1987? He could not have created him that long back. The way new Kumar loves me he seems to be from 1987 Kumar. Do they age in heaven as they do on earth, but at a faster rate. If that is the case in a month's time he would have aged 22 years as he claims, if so what is the significance of the year 1987? Sunitha might have an idea? She was closer to him that way, they both studied these things they called dimensions, from where Leena came and went away. Does his appearance have anything to do with Leena? Or Leena's disappearance has something to do with his death? When I came home, some movie was running on the tv, there they saw a photo and worried someone is not there in that photo, then using some kind of time machine they would go back in time manipulate and check the same photo and the person appears on the photo. If the same logic, if I apply here, Kumar said Leena is my daughter from the future, if I apply the same logic here when she disappeared, his death becomes imminent because he could not give me a daughter with his death, that is why she disappeared. Does my thinking process has any meaning? I don't know much about this science fiction, maybe if I can speak with Sunitha, she may throw some light into this. But how can I speak with her? I have not spoken with her after that day when she came to our house accusing Kumar of having sex with Mahira, which he refuted. Did he really had done that? It does not seem likely, she was always moving with Kirit, it has come to me as a surprise when Kumar brought Nishitha and proposed she marry Kirit as they both are Gujarathis. Did he not take Mahira into consideration here? Or did he try to separate them intentionally? What did he find about Mahira, that he separated Kirit from Mahira and still made her partner in his firm at the first opportunity? What did he find or did he have some kind of premonition about them, so he separated them. I think he had some kind of premonition only. I have only seen him smoking with her, except that he did not have any kind of interaction with her. He had even removed her

from Marketing director and then gave her MD position with kid's firm. Sometimes I don't understand what he does. Where am I going with my thoughts, I was thinking about speaking with Sunitha and I am went away to Mahira. I have to make an effort to speak with Sunitha.

Sunitha

I sat with children watching a movie on the tv. Kumar got up and went out possibly to have a fag. Sunitha came over and sat on the sofa. She never came and sat there. It seems she wants to talk something with me. I asked the kids did you complete your homework. They got up they went to their room saying we will come back after doing homework. I looked at Sahithi to say what she wants to say. She thought a moment and said it is to do about the scientific books you read. After Leena came here, Kumar told me that she is from our future and she is my daughter from the future and I am affected by my future self's sadness. Then when she went away he said she had gone to my future self. Do you think there is truth in that she went back or just disappeared? I asked her why do you think she just disappeared instead of going to your future self? Sometime back I watched a movie with you on time travel, do you remember? I said yes. She said in that they look at a photo and say a person is missing in this photo and they went back in time and manipulate the events and find the person returning to the photo. I said yes. Now, what if Leena missing indicative that Kumar will not give me Leena because he is killed before that, like what happened now. I said it could be possible. Then that means Kumar already had an idea that he is going to die before long. I said it is possible. She said so, knowing he has not much time left because he could not predict when he is going to die, he was about to announce that Loveleen be made business head of the companies. I said it is possible, he might have an idea that could happen. Then did he get killed because he was about to appoint Loveleen as the business head? Someone who has knowledge that she is about to become business head, killed him before he could make that announcement. I was stunned by her logic. She is linking Leena's disappearance to Kumar's death. But who had such hatred against Loveleen becoming business head. If we can find that person then we can find his murderer. But where is Joy? Does she have something to do with Kumar's death, if not why after knowing he had come back from dead disappeared after reaching Bombay?

You have a point there but how that will help us find details about his death. Did he make a note in his diary about impending death? But where is his diary?

I looked towards the door, Kumar standing there listening to our conversation. He came over and sat down on the sofa and asked where is my laptop. I remember getting a laptop before going to Hyderabad for installing Hospital software. I looked at Sahithi. She said it should be in his library. I tried to read his diary after his death but it was asking password and I don't have any password with me. I asked her so, the laptop should be in the library? We three went to look in the library. But we can't find any laptop. I remember he used to save what is written into the server. He is not worried someone will read it because it is password protected. Kumar asked Sunitha do you know where I used to save it on the server. She sat down on the chair and connected to the server and copied the files from the server. She run the program and checked the dates and said there is data up to 30th December. So, he may not have got time to write for the 31st. We sat down in front of her and I asked her to read what he has written for 30th.

I started to read:

"I was feeling there is a danger coming upon us. I checked all around the house. Did not find anything suspicious. We had a meeting with Sena Pramukh about the debacle in the elections. Shakha Pramukh said the members of the party are angry with you. They are saying they have not been advised properly this time. You have given them wrong projections, which is why the loss in the elections. I said forget about those members, what do you think about losing in the elections. He said you have given your 100 per cent in this election. We just lost by 8 seats. The opposition alliance was done after the results. Another point they have raised is that you have gone over to Hyderabad and had not concentrated on our elections. They are saying it could be the reason for our failure. I said I told you many times in the past that I am no politician, I am a businessman, we were expanding our business in the south and we found Hyderabad to be a good base for managing our businesses in the south. However, I kept an eye on your elections and advised as seem fit. I thought being in the power you will have an upper hand in the elections. He said whatever happened, happened and this section of members are asking me to remove you from the advisory panel. I said it is up to you. I don't mind not thinking about politics, I can concentrate on my business. I am not a miracle worker. Thanks for the support you have given me all these years. Bye and came out of their office.

I went back to the office and Joy said their software project for the US client has been approved after testing and they have started using the software and they have wired the final payment. I said we will have a party tomorrow for the 31

December night. Call all the people, we should show the clients we have beat the Y2K bug. She said this time you were away for a long time. I said we have started branches in other cities of the South. I was allotting the staff around those new branches. We are sending experienced people there and appointing new people at Hyderabad. You know we had taken offices in Cyber Towers. Under the CM's rule, the software would grow exponentially. We might shift our software division there. We are going to lose Sena's support here. Maybe we will sell these properties and shift there. Joy said I don't have any problem, shifting over there. I was always asking you to shift me to other branches. But all this while you were telling me that I should operate in Head Quarters. I said I am only thinking about kids' 10th standard studies next year. Dhruv is already studying there. I am thinking about Atul and Reena. I might take them there and put them on the CBSE syllabus. I was told there are good schools are there. I might check with them. I will check with the schools if they will accept them there for the 9th standard. I have to speak with Sahithi, I don't know how she feels about it. She can hand over the office to Nishitha and come over there. Tomorrow at the party I will announce the shift after confirming with the others. We will have a board meeting tomorrow. Call everyone for the meeting. She said ok, I will tell Pauleen to inform them.

Joy said Sunitha is miffed with you. I asked why? She said there are rumours that you are living with Loveleen in Bangalore and she is pregnant with your child. I asked is she pregnant? She has not even told me. I have not been to Bangalore for the last six months. In fact, she was staying in Madras for the last six months. I expressed surprise and said I will speak with her now. I asked what you were saying about Sunitha? Joy said she is saying you have forgotten her. I said see I have not forgotten her, why am I planning to shift the offices to Hyderabad, so she will be closer to me only. I think you know our relationship, she is dear to me. I have already booked a bungalow beside Nandini's bungalow. She got them to sell cheap. Joy asked what is your relationship with Nandini? I said she is a good friend. We maintained that relationship despite our differences of opinion. Now she is married and she is expecting a baby. She is happy with her life. She has helped me a lot in getting a foot in the Hyderabad software market. I had brought a big plot of land in Madhapur on her advice. Now many builders are approaching for building a tower in line with Cyber Towers. I have not decided yet on that. We will discuss all these matters in tomorrow's meeting. I will prepare an agenda and send it to you all".

I stopped reading and looked up. This part was not given to me and I have not checked or read it. He is saying he is going to keep me close. But he did not say anything about our relationship, so I read it as it is written.

Sahithi said he had not written about appointing Loveleen as business head here. He did not discuss it in the board meeting also. So, he was not planning to announce Loveleen being the business head at the party. So, Kumar was it your idea to appoint her as business head now. He said after reading through his book, I saw him grooming her for that post, I thought he wanted her to take over as Business Head if he decided to do something else. Sahithi said so until his death he was not aware of his imminent death, he thought some danger is upon us.

Kumar said from his interaction with Mr. Deshpande it seems they don't want to use him as advisor anymore. Why they would try to hurt him, what advantage would they gain by that? Sunitha can I see the poll results? there is something in that why they lost the CM post.

I went and looked through the old papers and brought the election results and subsequent changes in the political scenario. After looking through them, Kumar said there was no mistake on my side, we were in a good position only NCP has cheated us, they went and supported congress to come into power. It is just politics, what does it have to do with predictive analysis. That must be the reason he destroyed the copies of the software. Sahithi said it does not look like that, the software was destroyed by someone else, he would not destroy that knowing he could easily make the software again. They killed him for using the software and destroyed the copies. So, no one else in our firm will ever use it. But what they don't know is that, it can't be used by anyone else. The software is protected by a password and he has not told anyone or anyone who knows the password and how to use the software. Then what is the use of destroying the software?

Who would do such a thing to destroy the software? It seems it is the act of some outsiders. Who does not even have an idea of how that works. He never let anyone lay hands on it. Developers must have tried to reverse engineer the code or tried to break up the password. Maybe someone had kept a copy of the software when they tried to do that. We have to sit with the developers to find out any information.

Kumar

It seems the rumours were correct. He was killed for his role in politics or elections. From what Sunitha says it can't be Sena Members who could have done that. They would not have any reason to destroy the software. Knowing he is dead they would have tried to coax someone else to use the software in the next elections. So, it must be the opposition party. This time they coasted through with the help of a last-minute coalition. But they may not be so lucky next time, so they must have killed him and destroyed the software. But how do they know about the software and where it is kept in the servers and all, so they must have a person in our midst. Who is that person is the question now? If we can find the person, can we get to the truth?

I looked at Sunitha, she wanted to speak with me privately. I got and went over to the library and she followed me. Sahithi sat there and not moved an inch, she must be thinking something, like we all thinking, who killed Kumar?

We sat down and she said we have to speak with the developers to find any copy of the software available? I said what is the need for the software? I can say I made a new software and we can continue to do predictions, maybe somewhere else. If they think their idea flopped, they may think to attack me again, this time we would have an idea of what we can expect.

Sunitha said you have a point there but I want to know if any one of the developers tried to reverse engineer the code or tried to retrieve the password by brute force. I said you also have a point there. If he tried that he could have copied the code somewhere. We will call the developers and verify with them. Could Joy have tried to do that? Sunitha replied she can try it, she is the most experienced developer here. But she is missing from the time she knew you were back. I still feel she is not part of any conspiracy, she might have been kidnapped. I said if she had been kidnapped why Bob had not tried to help us? He could have easily brought her here; the only reason can be he did not know where she is. So, they don't follow all the people in my life and they don't always try to intervene. Maybe they need to take permission from their boss for any intervention. I got up and Sunitha asked for a fag? I nodded and picked the packet from the drawer and walked out. Sunitha came behind me and I came out and lit a fag and I heard the dogs barking and went to see what it is. There is an outline of a person on the ground and dogs are barking at that. I looked closely it is lady. I called Sunitha see here. She looked at her and said Joy, and tried to wake her up. I called the watchman. With his help we took her to the hall and lay her on the sofa. She looked pale as if she has not seen sunlight for a

long time. And she looked weak and thin. I looked at Sunitha, she said see how thin she became, it seems she was not given proper food and water. Better take her to the hospital. It seems she was in captivity for longer than the time she is missing. I told the watchman to help carry her to the car and place her on the backseat. Sunitha sat with Joy's head placed on her thigh. I drove to the hospital that was built by the Sena. I stopped the car outside, an attender seeing me brought a stretcher and we placed her took her to the emergency. As we are one of the persons who helped build the hospital, we got a quick response and a doctor is called and he looked at her asked what happened to her? I said she seemed to be kidnapped and returned. They started giving her saline and other treatments immediately, he said we have to wait until morning to know how serious her condition is. I will call one of the specialists. We came and sat down outside the emergency. After half an hour, another doctor rushed in and came out after 10 minutes and said she seemed starved and might take some time to recover, it seems she is out of danger. If she is treated like this for a few more days, it would have been difficult to save her. I looked at Sunitha, it seems they realized they could not keep her longer and returned her.

The doctor advised you go home and come back tomorrow, we will keep an eye on her until then. I asked when can we speak with her? He said it may take some time for her to speak, let us see. Don't worry Mr. Kumar we will take care of her. She is like one of us, she did a lot of work with the staff for installation and training the software. I have seen her interacting with the Nursing staff for entering patients' data. She has done a good job, we can check patients' reports sitting at our desk. I know your contribution to the hospital, it was you who have taken the initiative to build this hospital. I heard you have collected the donations personally from the big companies. But you look different, did you get some kind of treatment to look younger? Now I remember someone told me you had died and how come you are here, are you his younger brother or what? I said you can think so. We will come in the morning, Sunitha let us go. We came out and took the car and reached our house.

We got up the next day and readied and went over to the hospital. The doctor said she is out of danger but she needs more time to recover from the ordeal she had. Still, she has pipes going through her mouth, and medicines are given through iv. She opened her eyes for a minute looked at us and closed her eyes. She must have thought she had felt safe in the hospital. After they removed the pipes through her mouth, due to which she could not speak clearly. She was given iv for another two days and they removed them as she could feed a little through the mouth. Doctors gave her a small machine to do breathing exercises

to increase her breathing. Slowly she was coming back to normal. We did not pressurize her to tell her ordeal. After another week she must have felt confident and safe and started to narrate her story little by little. As she came out of the airport and looking for a cab, a cab came and stood in front of her and she got in and it drove out of the airport and went a little further down the road, some people stopped the cab and got in with her and threatened her with pistols and told the driver to go. They took her to someplace and tied her up and would only give her little food and water. Then later they shifted her to a place they tied her with chains and left her there on her own. Once a day they would give her some food and water and would leave her there to die on her own. One day she became unconscious and they must have left her on our grounds. But she could not say why she was kidnapped. She said her husband might have got her kidnapped. They did not ask her anything and did not tell her anything. Just kept her locked up and gave food once a day only. She had to use the same room for even her toilet purposes, they have a small place in the corner with a water tap. Telling this she shuddered from remembering her ordeal. Her husband is in jail and even if he got her kidnapped there is nothing we can do.

Now we found Joy and eliminated her as the culprit of my death. We decided to look into the developers. We called a meeting in the conference room and I came directly to the point with them. I said from our server software for prediction analysis is missing. And it is also missing from my laptop, if anyone took a backup of the server and had a copy of the software please tell me I would reward the person handsomely. They said they will look for the software and would let me know when they found it, and they went away.

I said to Sunitha we have to wait and see. I looked her over, she must be around 30 now. But when compared with my Sunitha she would look elder by just 5 years only. That must be because of her working as an air hostess, she must have maintained herself. Maybe after leaving that job she might not have been looking after herself. But still that thing in her which I can't name it, was as I saw and went behind her then in the college days. It must be her personality or character. Even after knowing my indiscretions, she has forgiven me. She looked up and asked what happened? I am thinking about my Sunitha. What difference did you find between us? I said you worked in airlines and she is still not working. May be trying to join as an air hostess. I never spoke to her about what she is doing. Sunitha asked what do you do when you meet. We have lots of fun, she asked who we? I said I, Sunitha, and Anjali. We spend every weekend doing something. I have a half-day on Saturday. Anjali has a full day, then Sunitha is

free. So, I get home and then Sunitha comes over we prepare something for the night and Anjali comes over in the evening. Then we have a party and spend the night. If we have holidays on Saturday or Monday, then we go on a trip somewhere. She said so, you are enjoying life. I said I am taking life as it brings.

We got up and went to my room and she closed the room and locked it and came and sat beside me on the sofa. We had a go and she went back to her room. I thought about what I had done in my college days and am I going back to those days? Those days I have done for money, now for enjoyment. Over that these ladies are what I would call my known people. Who I had relations with.

Then they are falling in head over heels about me. Among all of them, I like Sunitha very much. Then I would say Loveleen, she is beautiful but I get a little scared with her attitude. I can't be with her like I was with Sunitha. Sahithi as she is his wife, I have to show some consideration that she should not feel I am not really her husband Kumar. Nandini I have met briefly until I read about her in Kumar's book I don't know much about her and after coming back to Bombay I had not a chance to have any interactions with her and she is over seven months pregnant. Here only Sunitha knows my real story and she could understand me. I don't want others to know my previous history or my previous life. I don't know how they would take that. Even my Sahithi I have not told her anything, only because my Sunitha went and told them about my history they not only cancelled my marriage but took her away. Where they could have gone? I don't think they could go away aboard on such short notice, only if they have someone there like a son or daughter. I know they don't have a son and Sahithi's sister stays in Bombay, but I don't know where she stays. Can I know from this Sahithi's sister where they live and go and find them in my timeline? But what I understand is that both the sisters got a flat each, then Sahithi's sister would be living in the flat her grandmother gave then and it would be different in my timeline. The only way is asking Uday where Sahithi's sister stays. Why I did not think to check with him all this time? Maybe I don't want to find her.

Note: to know this Kumar's previous history before coming here please refer *Three Idiots and an Innocent man* by the same author.

Sunitha

Kumar only confides with me. I don't think he would have told his story to anyone else. Who would tell others he worked as a gigolo? That he told me because I caught him and made me tell him. But who would do such a thing at

such a young age? He said he was just 17 then and got carried away. They must have got him addicted to those things. It is great he could get out of that life. Maybe going to Bombay has helped him or meeting that Sunitha. Did she have such an impression on him? He would leave all the addictions and could get away from such a life. Now our next agenda is to find who killed Kumar. What he is used to tell, the elimination process. I should sit with Kumar and use that to find who could have killed him. What is the time, it is 12 noon. Still, the time before lunch and I went over to his room. I knocked and opened the door, he looked up from the papers he is reading. He must have got the rest of the story printed after the copy I printed. I asked him how do you know the password. He said what password he would put for this story and mouthed I love you Sunitha. I said you guessed correct. I want to use the elimination process to find his murderer. We will start with Joy. He said from her condition we will keep her aside and will come to her last. I said Next Sahithi. He asked what she would gain by killing him, or what could have forced her, she would have to kill him? I said then Loveleen, she does not have anything to gain only to lose. Then Mahira. She has only gained from him and nothing to lose if he is alive. If he had threatened to remove her from her position, then we can consider her name. then Nishitha, Pauleen and Nandini. There is no reason to doubt their integrity. Is there anyone else who has any kind of anger on him to take revenge on him? He looked at the book and said there could be one person who would be angry with him. I asked who is that? He said, Dolly. I said she is in jail with her boss. He said being in jail ever prevented those people from operating from the jail. But how to know it is who did it? He said the only way is to go in front of her and see her reaction. I said the way you wanted to find out if Sneha's parents had something to do with her death. He said exactly. I said for that we have to find which jail she is kept in and what were charges filed against her. But what does it have to do with Joy? Why they could have kidnapped Joy? To divert the suspicion from them? That could be the only reason.

Kumar

Sunitha is trying to use the technique Kumar used to find Sneha's killer, which is eliminating suspects. We eliminated whoever was close to me or who is living under the roof. No one seemed to have any reason to kill me then an idea struck me from the book in front of me. It was the scene where Kumar and Nandini go to Mr. Naidu's office without an appointment. Where he lays his eyes on Dolly. Yes, Dolly could be a suspect. Why we have read a lot of stories where ganglands running their empires from the jail cells. Why she can't do the same. Her boss always stayed in the background. She was the main person who their

gang members knew. Even if the boss comes in front of them, they would think who is this fellow and move around him without noticing him. His word would mean nothing to them. It is not the case with Dolly, she seemed the mastermind behind the criminal activities performed by the gang. Every one of the gang members knew her and follows her orders. They know the punishment for not following her orders to the T. She is a very strict lady boss, I would call her that. When Sunitha asked me, who could it be I blurted out Dolly? She agreed with me but she said how can we be sure that she is the one. I said the only way is to go in front of her. She said like we informed Sneha's parents to see their reactions. I said yes, the same way. We need to see her reaction, if she is the one who got me killed, she would seethe with rage and would curse her gang members for not finishing the work. But I still feel she must have someone in the house to carry out her scheme. Sunitha said first let us find out if it is her scheme or not, then we can search for the accomplice.

First, we have to find her, which jail she is kept. The best way to find is to call Mr. Naidu, now with newfound clout, he can help us find the details. I pulled the phone to my front. She asked are you making a call, I said yes, to Mr. Naidu. She nodded her head. I picked up the receiver and looked for the diary his number and called. His PA lifted the receiver, I was told we had a good chat about Dimple with him. I said I am Kumar from Bombay. He said tell me Mr. Kumar what can I do. I said you remember Dimple? He said how can I forget her. I said now I want to know which jail she is kept in. He asked why I said I have a little doubt she might be responsible for my death. He must have taken a deep breath, I heard you were dead from a heart attack, now you have risen from dead, how is it possible. I said I will tell you all that when I meet you, check with the police department and get me the details. But don't let her know about my return, that is very important. He said ok I will do that and call you back, bye and he cut the call.

I said we have to wait for the call, let us go and sit in the hall. We went and the kids were watching the tv. I asked them don't you have school. Atul replied we have a holiday today. I asked him what are you watching. He said WWF. I asked what it is it? He said world wrestling federation. So, what is going on I asked. He said wrestle mania and Undertaker is going to fight stone cold Steve Austin. I remember seeing the Undertaker matches when the tv turned colour. Then a lot of new channels were introduced and they were running some programs continuously. One of the programs were Undertakers matches. How he used to get up when he is down is the main attraction of those matches. I used to sit at the window to watch Sunitha's room and watch those matches on the TV. There

was a match going on the tv and the fighter receives a head injury and blood gushes out of the injury. Then as soon as it started it stopped flowing. I said so fast blood clotting. Sunitha said I have read somewhere that they use medicines to thicken the blood. It is opposite to blood thinners used on heart patients. Then an idea struck me and I called Rohan the heart surgeon, he would know about this. He lifted the phone and said hello, I said hello, Kumar here. He said hello Kumar, how are you doing? Are you having any problems after coming back? I said I am fine and I wanted to know about blood thickening medicines. I just saw the tv some wrestling match and Sunitha says they use blood thickening agents to stop blood from injuries. She was telling it is opposite to blood thinners used on heart patients. He said what she says is correct. We use blood thinners on heart patients who are waiting to be sent to heart surgery and after surgery too. I asked so what is the effect of using those blood thickening medicines on the heart patients or those heavy smokers. They will have problems with heart functioning and they may get heart attack also. I asked will it be known in post mortem. He said if they think it might be the reason then they may check. I said so, normally they may not check. He said I think so. I asked how Nandini is doing. When she is expected. He said another month. I said let me know in advance I would like to be there by her side. He said ok. I cut the call and cradled the receiver. I said to Sunitha using blood thickeners may cause heart patients to have heart attacks. She said there is a chance of that being used on you. Let us wait and see if we can get where Dolly is kept.

I received a call from PA regarding where Dolly is kept. He said she is in Cherlapally Jail in Hyderabad. I told him to get us permission to visit. I told Sunitha about the information. She said she will book the tickets to Hyderabad. She came back there is a late-night flight to Hyderabad.

We landed in Hyderabad and took a room at the hotel near the airport where we stayed last time with Nandini. We spend the night in the room and morning I called PA and he said to go to the jail, they will let us go to see her. We readied and went to the jail, when we told our names, they took us to the block where Dolly is kept. When Dolly saw me, she said I heard you came from dead. But you are looking like when you came to our party, before going to Nashik. How you managed to do that. I said I created a clone of me and put it on ice. She asked what do you mean. I said he send me back to see you rot In jail. Why did you do it? She said I thought if I kidnap Joy, your software business will shut down, but you came back. I said what are you talking? She asked did you not ask me why did I kidnap Joy? I said it was you who kidnapped Joy. She said did she die in that hell hole I made for her? I said no, she was sent to our home packed. Now she is

in hospital, recovering. Dolly said these idiots, I told them to send her back only after her death. I asked so when did you know I came back. She said recently when you went to Vijayawada and returned, my people saw you at the airport with your kids. I said you kept your people at the airport to see who comes and who goes. She asked but how did you come back? I said you may not have seen the movie, where Yama asks to choose from other 7 people like me. He chose this body and send me down to see your gang's end. But I did not understand why you had to get me killed? She asked why would I kill you and who killed you, I don't have any idea. If you had been a witness or something like that, I would have got you killed. Even Kirit, as he might be witness, I might have tried to. But why would I kill you? I looked at Sunitha, who is listening to all this. She said if she is saying she did not kill you, we might have to believe her. Otherwise, she would be boasting about killing you. I said you are right, to Dolly thanks for not killing me. Dolly said tell me how did you come back from being dead. I said I told you I had made clones of me and iced them. I have 6 more clones, which I can bring back if anyone kills me.

We returned to the hotel and Sunitha asked did you really have clones of you on the ice. I said I just told that to tease her. She would not dare to think of killing me. I know of another two Kumars in this world. She exclaimed you know two more Kumars. I said I stand corrected Kumars of, I know of two more Kumars of. Who are they she asked? I said one is Pujari who has saved my Sahithi from being pregnant and does labour and send her back. Another is Leena's father. From Kumar's writings, he tried to understand who he is and about his family. Finally decided they are from an alternate universe or dimension. Sunitha said we discussed those matters and we studied those books too. So, you know about Pujari and this Kumar and you read from his book about Leena's father. But from your experience, you think they are not the alternate universe or dimension but these are timelines. What is the difference between them? I said alternate universes or dimensions have to be existing and be separate from one another. But timelines are of the same origin and they split from some point in time. From what I understand from all these stories is the common point of the split is from the time of completion of junior college and Sneha sent away from her home. From the story of this Kumar, he joins a college in Hyderabad and elopes with Sneha after one year. In Pujari's story he joins a college in Vijayawada like me and then he meets Sneha when she comes home when her mother injured in an accident and then with the help of Nimisha goes to a village and becomes pujari. From what I understand about Leena's father he is staying with his parents when Leena goes missing. This Kumar also has some kind of premonition about her details. Now my story and pujari story had

Nimisha as a common person as we both studied in Vijayawada. She helps him escape with Sneha and my Nimisha does different things. So, in my knowledge, I have four Kumars including me and what we have in common is Sneha in our junior college and her subsequently being sent away by her parents. So, what do you think about these events? One thing none of them encountered is Bob, who has sent me here. From all this, I feel they are not dimensions but timelines being manipulated by intelligent beings. They have split the time to see what are the effects on people, especially the people around me. Because they are manipulating people's life. Leena is sent here to save her from kidnappers. My daughter Leena was born in the house of Pujari because my Sahithi was worried that how her family would react if she told them about her being pregnant. Now those people who were watching her must be knowing her parent's reactions, so to divert the story they have sent her to Pujari in the future where he enters Bombay, and after she gives birth, they send her back to her house. Now you should have seen the Sahithi when I first met her and the Sahithi I met later on. In a few months, I saw the sea of difference in her. First, I thought about what happened, later she told me her story and I had believed her and this has been confirmed by Raj. He said one day she was normal and the next day she looked like a mother of a child. Sunitha asked what her parents said about her looks. I said she covered it by telling them she had eaten something, which must have given a reaction, they had to believe her as she just missed a few hours for those 7 to 8 months of time. Who would do that kind of manipulation? You might say, god. I might say someone is doing scientific experiments. They are studying how time can be manipulated. Now, this is just a simple study, they might have some other ideas for the future. Maybe how to start a war or to stop a war, things like that. Sunitha asked who is this Raj, you also mentioned to Krishna, I have not heard about him before. I said he is Krishna's friend, and this Kumar brought the puppies from his sister's husband. He is the one who provided Sahithi with the room, and Sahithi became pregnant from the time we had in that room. Sunitha said so he is kind of catalyst in your romance. I said you can say that. He could be put in there by the people who are manipulating the timelines. Now look at this Pujari Kumar does not know about any Sahithi in his timeline, when he went to their house they went abroad. If they had been there two Sahithi's would have met and it could create a phenomenon known as a paradox. So, they skipped them from the scene. Or she was sent to him in 1984 from 1982, knowing that Sahithi would not be there. So, they can manipulate time also. My daughter Leena was sent to me as 8 years old. That too after just one and half years. I did not understand their play in all this. They might want to see my reaction when she is sent when I was with my Sunitha. It

seems they want to know how I would manage the scene. You are there with me and a girl comes in front of me and calls me dad and asks where is my dhoti and why am I wearing trousers. Think about the scene. Sunitha could not stop her laughter and says I would think she is your daughter at first, then seeing her age I would think she made a mistake recognizing you or she might be the daughter of someone elder to you. I said that must be the reason they gave her back at that age. They may not want to spoil our relations because of her and they know that Sahithi would not be in my life much longer. Or they would have seen us getting split over her or it could be that she would not recognize us if she was any younger. Then they have to find another way to bring us together. Also, they are sure Sahithi would not raise her, she was just visiting her and not being a mother to her. So, they have all the permutations and combinations and did it this way. Sunitha said when you tell me all this it is becoming more and more confusing.

I said forget about the timelines come here and give me a kiss, all these talks about Sunitha and Sahithi is giving me a hard-on. She came and stood before me and I kissed her on the breasts over her dress. Having completed our coupling and rolled over her and said I always feel you and my Sunitha are one and same. How is it possible? I can't make a difference. Maybe I am being with you for all this time.

Sunitha said I find a lot of difference between you and him. Recently it has been hurried coupling with him. He would rush away because he was scared about Sahithi would be knocking on the door. Then you don't care about Sahithi, because you are not married to Sahithi.

If you go back to your timeline, I would miss you. I said I can't take you with me there, because I have another Sunitha there and I won't miss you.

Let us go to our flat. We took our luggage and went to reception and informed them that we are checking out. They prepared the bill and we paid the balance amount and took a cab and reached the flat. We left the luggage at the flat and went over to the hospital. We went to Nandini's cabin first. She got up from the chair and looked me over and gave me a hug. She said I still could not understand how you could come back. I thought it won't be a problem if I tell her the truth. I said I was sent by someone from my timeline to set things right in the businesses here. Or was it to find the reason for my death. For some purpose they send me here, what they told me is that I had to set the businesses right, which I have done by appointing Loveleen as the business head. She will head all the businesses and she should interfere if there are any

issues between the businesses. One thing I could not understand is my meeting you in 1987. Because Kumar can't remember coming to meet you. Is it someone else coming to meet you or do you have some kind of memories from other timelines? Because I have not reached that year, I could not understand anything. Maybe I will meet you in the future. She asked did you really came from our past. I said I would say I was brought to your present from my present of 1986. It is all confusing but I am getting some kind of understanding of how they are working. From my understanding now, I have come across 4 Kumars including me. I have only met Sneha, Sahithi and Sunitha. Whereas Sneha does not seems to be in others' life except Pujari Kumar. In this timeline she is dead. In my timeline, she must be at her grandparent's place or married off. And I don't know anything about the Kumar's Sneha whose Leena has lived here. Leena did not recognize her from the photos. But one thing I feel Sneha was somehow present in our life in the intermediate college. From that, I deduced our timelines are separated to make each one's life a little different. Other than that, I could not find much about the other Kumars. There were some manipulations with people, like Leena and my Sahithi.

Nandini said come let us go to lunch. We went to a nearby restaurant for lunch.

We came back to the hospital after lunch. I touched Nandini's stomach and asked how many months? She said 36 weeks. In another month the baby would come. I felt a movement from the baby, felt a feeling of belonging. I looked at Nandini and asked, is it? She nodded her head. I asked how? She said he had given me word that he would give me a baby. I made him fulfil his promise. I read about her asking him to promise to give her a child. He did not write she asked him to fulfil the promise. Maybe he did not want the world to know about Nandini's baby. I asked her boy or girl? She said it is a boy. I told her we will go to our offices and see how the work is going on. She said she will come and see us in the evening. Maybe we can have sit in. I said you can't drink. She said I can sit with you and spend some time. Prathap is out of the city and Rohan also wants to sit and speak about your experiences. I said ok, if not in the office, we will be at the flat. We said bye to Nandini and walked to our offices.

I took a meeting with the developers and Sunitha is meeting with Loveleen's firm's salesman. I reviewed the progress of the development going on and thought why did he shift the main development from Bombay to Hyderabad. He must have thought Hyderabad would be a good business centre in the future or it would be better than Bombay due to cost reasons. If it's cost reason he would not have brought space in cyber towers. I have to go and check the status of offices there.

This is the first time I have come to the Cyber Towers. There is full security and a person from our offices had to come and clear us to take to our offices. The tower is itself an imposing structure. I am told being in the cyber towers we got 50 per cent orders. That could be the reason, this Kumar must have brought the offices here. He has great foresight. Our people have done a great job of decoration. Sunitha informed me that Sahithi looked after the decoration herself.

Sahithi has come a long way from being a steno to Interior decoration firm's manager. She must be good at getting people to work. We went and sat in my cabin. I told the manager to call for a meeting in the conference room. He went away to organize the meeting.

When the meeting is organized I spoke to them, you must have known my return from dead, I have only one reason to come back, that is there are problems in the organization level in our companies. There is coordination lacking between companies and departments. One of the developers says I am not getting enough respect from others, another says we are getting complaints from the clients about the software not properly debugged and released. One director complained the salesmen are not selling hardware when selling software. Another director says we are not getting leads from the salesman. Why I am telling you this is that after my going away there is a complacent set in the company. People are either taking it easy or might be thinking about what we will get if we work or not. I want to know what happened with you all. Why are you chosen to work in this company? Because you are the best in the industry. Now I am back and I am not the previous Kumar, you might have seen. I going to monitor each and everyone's performance. I am not going to tolerate complacency anymore. You will get just one chance to pull up your socks and come up with brilliant software, not just ordinary software. Now Joy is back from being kidnapped. She is recuperating, when she is ready to come back to the office, I will send her here and she will look over all the development. Now Loveleen madam is appointed as the head of business means you will get someone as the MD for your company. Let us hope he or she is not as soft as the previous me or not hard as the present me. You can go back to your seats.

I looked at Sunitha and asked how is my speech to the developers? You were not subtle as you used to be. You were direct to the point. Now get this speech transcribed and send it to all the branches.

I think it is better to transfer developers from the office over here, I did not understand why you had to keep some developers there? Let everyone work

from here. That space you can use for other business activities. Also, shift hardware division to here. We have all this office space, use it for maximum effect. Let them work their interior design firm there. Take initiative and do the things. Initiative is missing from the people after I left.

Sunitha, I am going to put you as Operations Head – Director. You are going to be in-charge of operations of whole business unit. You will be responsible for all the companies. These people need someone to look up to. They should be reminded to think someone is always looking at them. This is the only way to make them work. Sunitha asked why the sudden change of tactics. I said I have read what Kumar wrote about running these companies. He always gave people autonomy, until he is there people followed him, now after he left they can't work thinking there is no one looking at them working. It is like this if you believe in god you would be thinking if do this Paap god will punish me, so, avoid that. Then if you realize there is no god, no one will punish you, then what will you do? What is Paap or Punya, there is no one is keeping a track of them, then why to do any Punya, what will we lose if we do Paap. This kind of attitude is sinking into these people, the only way is to show them some one is looking at them working, if one person shows his progress in the company, he will rise else he will be demoted and if he does not show any promise then he will be thrown out. That fear should be there in the workers. I called up Pauleen and said to send this communique to the board of directors. From this moment on Sunitha is appointed as Operations Head – Director, will look at the operations of all the companies under us. She will only report to the board of directors.

I said see, I put you as a separate Head equivalent to Loveleen. So, all the employees will report to you through their managers. So, now Loveleen will look after the Department heads and intercompany matters, you will be looking after the employees. You have to take tough decisions on all the matters, hope you can come up to that. After the board approval we will send this to all the branches and offices.

We were back in the flat. In the evening Nandini came over to us. I told her I had appointed Sunitha as an Operations Head. She asked what is the sudden change of mind. I said these people were without proper management. No one is interested in work, they need someone to put pressure on the managers and then they will put pressure on their subordinates. I thought this is the only solution to the company's problems. She asked what about Loveleen? I said Loveleen is head of the Business. She will look after the all the company heads and try to resolve inter business problems. Sunitha will look after the business managers and will follow up with them to see how the businesses are running.

Sunitha asked but it was not the way Kumar had organized the companies? I replied that is the reason I had to come to set the things right with these companies. It seems his setup has failed a little, I would not say failed totally. I am trying to remove bottlenecks in the management. Next, I will promote Sahithi to Loveleen's firm MD. Now Loveleen is looking after the total business, someone need to be head of her companies. Some kind of reorganization should help the companies. I called Pauleen and asked to put another proposition to the board, that to promote Sahithi to MD of Loveleen's Interior decorations firm. She deserves the promotion.

Sunitha asked aren't you going a little too fast? I said I am moving very slow as per my estimates. Until I complete my work here I can't go back to my time.

She asked what so urgency to go back? I said I have to look after my future, I wanted to start some business, with this experience I can start my own business. Sunitha said don't you think you lack the experience of this Kumar. He had to learn a lot by hit and miss, now you are only hitting you not missing because this business is vast and it can take some hitting, if you go on like this you will start to get back some resistance.

Now I understood this is jealousy talking. What did he write in his last day about keeping her close? He wanted to keep her close, he was not thinking about offering any positions. Now I had put her as Operations Head of whole business group. Now she will be head over Loveleen's company also and automatically she would be boss to Sahithi and still she is jealous of Sahithi. What Sahithi has and Sunitha is missing? Only marriage? Shall I marry her, she is my sweetheart and I wanted to marry my Sunitha in the near future. According to me, I am not yet married, why shouldn't I marry Sunitha and give her the status or mind peace or whatever she is missing. I looked into her eyes, and kept staring into them, she did not flinch, I said let us get married. Then she flinched and shook her head. I asked you don't want to marry me? She said It is not that, I am thinking did I hear correctly or not. I said you heard correctly, I asked shall we get married? She said I have been waiting for these words from you for all these years, now you are asking me. I asked did he never proposed to you? She said he must be thinking he is already married twice and how he could he be asking that? Or he might have thought I would not be interested in marriage. Whatever could be the reason, he never once asked me about marriage. I thought asking her about marriage would keep her off the jealousy she would be feeling towards the Sahithi. I am trying to elevate Sahithi, but I have given Sunitha better position than Sahithi. This should keep both the ladies happy. Did I come here to keep ladies happy or to set right the company? I feel while setting the

company right what is wrong in keeping the ladies happy. There are only three ladies I had to keep happy here, Loveleen, Sunitha and Sahithi, in that order. So, in the same order, I have given them positions. Nandini is not my concern now, she never was.

I don't think he never loved her, he was always cautious with her. He felt she would always give him heartbreak and kept her away, one thing I could not understand about her with him was about him coming to her house in 1987.

I got up and said let us go to Sunitha. She said where shall we go. I said let us go to the flat.

Sunitha

I thought Kumar is elevating Sahithi. Then he asked me shall we marry? Then it struck me he is keeping me above Sahithi. By elevating Sahithi, he is bringing her under me directly. At first, I did not understand his thinking. I even accused him of going too fast in taking decisions. But thinking over his decisions first he moved Loveleen to Business Head of the companies, she will be looking over all the companies, what her responsibilities? She has to attend to the intercompany complaints. It is like she is a figurehead to be approached when they can't decide who is correct. I think it would be good for them they should fix the problems among them rather than approach her. Then he put me as operations head for all the companies. Now that is real power, I will be overlooking all the companies operations. Instead of Loveleen, he gave me this position. I can question the working of any company or manager or staff. He must have thought if he did not elevate Sahithi, she might get jealous and he made her the MD of Loveleen's firm. Without the tag of MD, it is the work she is doing, so it won't make any difference to her, but instead of Loveleen, she will be reporting to me. Overall if I see what he had done, I will be the real winner in this shakeup.

We reached the flat and he said we will have lunch then see what else we had lined up. I told him I have an urgent matter to discuss and took him to the bedroom and locked the room. He must have understood from the locking of the room, he removed his coat and threw it aside. Then he removed the shirt and stood before me with a bare chest. He must be working out his body is better than Kumar's. Over that this Kumar had a technique which he must have improved during the past few years. I went and hugged him and kissed him, he kissed back, there is passion in his kiss. He must be thinking of his Sunitha, she must be younger than me by at least by 14 years. How she must be looking

before me. I hope I am better than her, otherwise, he would not come near me. Over that she has not started to work as an air hostess, which means she is just beautiful and tried to think how I would have looked after my degree. He told me she studied at Vijayawada, which means she would be ordinary beauty. I have to ask him once more how I am different from her, but this is not the time for all those talks.

I looked at Kumar he was already removing my dress and he removed it from above my head. I was clad in bra and undies. He removed the clip from behind and he removed the bra and pulled down the panties. I stood before him naked and he started to kiss my breasts and he made me sit on the bed and he sat between my legs and started licking my pussy. I arched back with pleasure and a moan escaped from me. He must have been encouraged by my moaning, he got up and removed his pants and underwear and turned me on my stomach and entered me from behind. I was moved with pleasure and started to orgasm. His power and technique can be seen by the way he handled me. He caught my breasts and moved rhythmically from behind. I don't know how many times I had reached the orgasm, spent he released me and sat on the bed. I went and kissed him and took my dress and started to wear them. He looked at me wearing the dress with the keenness of an appraiser. I asked him what do you see the difference between me and your Sunitha? He thought for a minute and said she is yet to develop her boobs and you are full breasted. She is one year younger than me. She would orgasm faster than you but she could perform longer than you. Normally we have a threesome, so it is difficult to see who is performing better of the two. They would try to outperform each other. It is like a competition for them. Then on Sunday, we have a bath together, that is another experience. I think you don't get to have a bath together, am I correct? I said once or twice when we were at the flat. But always we had hurried sex. Either because we meet after one or two weeks and then after shifting it was just not much time for us. Now I feel relieved of the stress of Sahithi finding us out. It was not like this before, I would be in Bombay and he would be going to other branches. He wrote on the last day, that he wants to keep me close, could it be he wants to take me on tour with him? Kumar said could be, we can't understand the person's last words, which he could not put it into action. He could have meant many number of things. He could have just told Joy, something to say to please you. He got up and wore his dress and said let us go and have lunch, I am starving.

We went to the kitchen and the dishes were placed on the table and we served ourselves and started to eat.

Completing our lunch, we went down to the office.

Kumar

We went to the office and enquired about the developers working from this office. I asked who is their supervisor. They said they don't have a supervisor there and they work on support for the applications running with the clients. I said you are transferred to the cyber towers from now on, go and report to the manager there. They said they will pack and from tomorrow they will report there.

I told the manager for Loveleen's firm, now they can use the total premises for themselves. Also introduced Sunitha and she would be the manager's supervisor from now on. She is operations head for all the companies and all the managers would be working under her. So, have her a cabin for her here.

I said let us go and meet Nandini. We went by walk to the hospital and went to her cabin, she was not there and we waited for her to return.

There is a knock on the cabin door and the door opening sounded and I turned my head and looked who is at the door. It is Prathap standing there when he saw me his reaction was looking at a ghost. He may not have known I had returned and he took the mobile from his pocket and started to make a call while walking. I looked at Sunitha, she understood and went behind him.

She came back after five minutes and said he is talking to someone about how he came back from dead? Any normal person would ask how you are here or how come you are back from dead or something like that. Why is he calling someone and asking how he is back from dead? Let us wait and see, if he is calling Nandini. Nandini came to the cabin after 10 minutes. She came in asked how long were you waiting? I said around 15 minutes. Your husband came ten minutes back, did he call you. She asked Prathap came here, no he did not call me. I looked at Sunitha. Sunitha got up and asked Nandini do you know where he could be? Nandini said some relative of his is at the hospital, he must be there with them. Sunitha asked which ward? Nandini said paying ward P02. Sunitha went away. Nandini asked what it is this. I said let us wait for Sunitha to come back to understand the situation.

I changed the subject and asked her how the hospital is running and what her father is working on. We chatted and I waited for Sunitha to return.

Nandini ordered tea for us and we had and she got a call from maintenance and she said she will be back and went away. I waited in the cabin and Nandini

returned from what ever she went for. She started to work on the system, I kept looking at her and thinking what is her relation to Kumar.

After almost an hour after she went away, Sunitha returned and told me come with her. I got up and went with her and we went over to the flat. She went and sat on the sofa and I went and sat beside her. I looked at her expecting she will say something. It seems she is in shock from the information she got. I put my hand around her shoulder and pulled her towards me and hugged her. She stayed like that for a long time. I waited for her to come out of the shock.

I removed my hand from her shoulders and went over to the kitchen to make tea. I put the tea on the stove and the servant came and said she will prepare it and bring it. I came back to the hall. Sunitha's eyes were filled with tears. I asked what happened? She said Prathap thought the kid Nandini is carrying is Kumar's and got him killed. I did not say anything. She said Kumar did not write anywhere the kid is his, then how he could suspect such a thing? I said he must be having doubt about their fidelity. Kumar had relations with her previous to her marriage, that is also because she seduced him. He was always trying to keep her away. He had to be with her because he had invested in the software. Then he had given them hardware from the firm on credit. He was looking after his investments. He also wanted her help for the hospital they wanted to build in Bombay. But how he could get the idea that Kumar could be father to her kid?

The servant brought two cups of tea and put it on the table. I picked one and gave her and picked one myself and started to sip. She was just holding the cup in her hand, I said have the tea and she started sipping it.

Completing her tea, she put the cup on the table and sat like a rock.

After 6 pm Nandini came and asked what happened you went away like that. I looked at Sunitha if she would reply to her. She did not move and I said Sunitha suspects that Prathap thinks that your kid is Kumar's and got him killed. Sunitha said how he could think like that? He does not have trust in his own wife.

We sat there like that for some time. I asked Nandini would you like to have something, perhaps tea. She asked are you having one? I said yes. She said then get me one, please. I got up and went to make tea. I put the tea on the stove and came back and sat down for it to boil. When I thought it would boil enough I went and filtered it and brought three cups and placed them on the table.

Nandini picked one and I took one and put it in Sunitha's hand and picked one and started to sip.

Then Nandini started telling what happened. Prathap told me he would be away for a week and I asked Kumar to fulfil his promise to give me a baby. At first, he was not forthcoming. I had to make him fulfil his promise to me. He reluctantly cooperated with me to have the baby. I had suspected Prathap was impotent when I could not get pregnant after two years, he must be knowing that. Instead of one week, he had been away for more than a month. Then when I become pregnant he must have suspected the baby was not his and must have checked around whose baby it could be. He must have zeroed on Kumar and he must have gotten in touch with Kumar's enemies and got him killed.

Sunitha said now who has helped him, I could not find, someone must be in the house only. I said Chitti said there was a cook who had come with Loveleen's servants, who was using some special salt. After Kumar's death she went away.

Nandini said I will see what I can do and went away. I called Pauleen and asked about the fixing board meeting. She said it is not fixed yet, I said ok, I might be here for another two or three days.

After 8 pm Nandini called and said Prathap had confessed to having a hand in Kumar's death. I switched on speakerphone to let Sunitha hear what she is saying. When Nandini had announced her pregnancy, he had checked her ultrasound reports and calculated her date of getting pregnant. He was aware of her relationship with Kumar previous to their marriage and he put 2 and 2 together and convinced himself that Kumar had not left her alone after their marriage. Now from what he told her that he was under impression Kumar is using some kind of blackmail to have sex with Nandini and he had impregnated her under coercion. So, he wanted to take revenge on Kumar and he had taken help from a person in your house. Sunitha asked who is in our house helped him? Nandini said if your hear the name you would be surprised. I said I wont be surprised, you can tell the name. Nandini said Sahithi had helped Prathap. Sunitha asked why did she help him, what did he tell her. She said he must have told her what he was telling me. Getting me impregnated under coercion. He might have also told her about his other relationships, with Sunitha and Loveleen. Sunitha asked but how did Sahithi help him? Nandini said your expectation is correct, he had supplied her with a blood thickening agent. Both of them were aware of his smoking habit, they would have anticipated he would have some kind of heart problem and they have used that to target him. He is not telling when or where she used the medicine on him. I said she could have

used the medicine when he was in the hospital bed, she went to see him after the doctors attended to him. Later he was declared dead from heart attack. Sunitha asked what is her idea, if she don't have Kumar, no one else could have him? Or she might have thought he had gone away from her or lost him forever. I said that could be the reason she was acting so close to me, to see if I am the same Kumar who she killed or not. It seems she must have spoken to him before killing him, must have made him aware why she is killing him. If I had been the same Kumar, I would have known her of intentions. So boldened by my lack of knowledge about her, I acted as if she is my wife, otherwise she would catch me in a lie. I said to Nandini we will speak later and cut the call. I asked Sunitha what was the distribution of Shares and assets after Kumar's death? Sunitha replied Sahithi got her share of Shares of the company. All Kumar's shares went to the kids. The bungalows are already in the kids company's name. I said so I don't have anything in my name. She said you are as good as a pauper, now.

I said so let us think about what we can do. If I ask Sahithi for divorce, her part of the shares she would have to share with me under divorce. She can say her husband Kumar is dead and I am not her husband by producing the death certificate, then I am not bound to her. She had option to give either divorce or declare herself I am not her husband. In that event, if I am not going back to my timeline, I would like to marry you, would you accept my proposal. Sunitha said I accept your proposal to marry and I am ready to wait whatever time we had to wait. I said then I will ask her to give a divorce and also half of her assets, that includes the part of her house. Then She would go and announce that I am not her husband and her husband is dead. This way we will get her to admit herself I am not married to her and I am not bound to her.

Let us go back to Bombay tomorrow. We will call a board meeting after accusing her of killing Kumar and ask for a divorce, she might consult a lawyer and come to the conclusion of declaring her husband dead, so no divorce is needed. Then when she declares we will see about the proposals we put forward to the board. If you reject my proposal to make her MD then everyone will reject or if Loveleen rejects, is enough to reject the proposal. Even if she is elevated to MD then she will be working under you only.

Sunitha

I lay on the bed and thought about what I wanted. After Kumar proposed marriage, If I see the pros and cons, he is young, energetic, maybe he did not have some flaws Kumar has. He is not scared to say and do what he wants. That Kumar would have thought ten times if he should do this or not. In making

business decisions, this Kumar is bolder than him. Just like that he decided to appoint me as Operations Head and called Pauleen to inform others. That Kumar would have spoken to all the others, then he would have put it in a board meeting. It was my dream come true if I can marry this Kumar as he proposed.

He is not married and he just have some relationships in his previous life. I should treat him a fresh person sent for me. Maybe after marriage, we may go to Hyderabad to live away from Sahithi. She might go back to her own house.

Everything seems favourable to me. What cons can I think about him. If I see his indiscretions in his college days, I was not aware of then if he did not tell them himself. He was a changed man after meeting his Sunitha, that means he ready to do anything for that Sunitha and if he had to stay back he would treat me as that Sunitha. Indirectly he said I am better than her. What else do I need.

Kumar

It is the day of the board meeting. I have already got Sahithi to give it writing through her lawyer that I am not her husband. Even if I take divorce she would not be liable to give me any of her assets as part of the divorce proceedings. That is all we wanted. Now in today's meeting, two items were put on the agenda, the first one being to appoint Sunitha as operations head and the second one being Sahithi to be appointed as Loveleen's firm's MD will replace Loveleen, as Loveleen will be looking after the position of Business Head. Here the main vote required is of Loveleen. It is her own firm and she is the deciding authority. So, we left the decision to Loveleen if she wants Sahithi to look after her firm or she would like to continue as MD.

Both the proposals were accepted by the board. Now Sunitha will look after the affairs of the group firms. And Sahithi would have work as MD under Sunitha as the Operations head. When the meeting is finished I called for champagne and announced I will be marrying Sunitha as Sahithi gave it in writing, she has no relation with me. We said we will wait for some time to see if I will not send back.

Epilogue

After few days of the board meeting Sunitha and Kumar got engaged officially. Sahithi went back to her own house to live. Kumar put the children in a School in Hyderabad where Dhruv was studying.

Slowly with the help of Mahira, he put both the office and house they were living for sale. One foreign company wants to set up their offices in India had lapped up the office and were ready to purchase the other three properties. Loveleen shifted to Hyderabad and stayed at the bungalow beside Nandini. Nandini told her father about Prathap's hand in getting Kumar killed, even though they don't have any proof to take official actions. She asked her father to get her a divorce from Prathap.

Sunitha and Kumar waited for another six months and he was not sent back to his timeline, they got married in Hyderabad and stayed there in the flat. Atul and Reena stayed with Loveleen and Dhruv as their school is nearby.

Nandini had a baby boy and She named him Vivek Kumar. Now Reena has three brothers.

Slowly they sold off the bungalows in Bombay put the money in Kids company and started other businesses than Computer hard ware supply.

Note: to understand what happened further please refer Three Idiots with an Innocent Man the Final Chapter By Ravikiran. Which should clear all the questions raised in these Series of Books Three Idiots with Kumar.

THE END

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