

## If only I could forget

‘Stop the car Sunder,’ Kami pressed the button. The glass window slid down. Cool tea-country air invaded the air conditioned climate-controlled atmosphere of the chauffeur driven Mercedes Benz.

‘Yes Madam,’ the rolling Indian Tamil accent of the driver combined with the fragrance of freshly plucked tea sent a shimmer down Kami’s spine.

‘Now what?’ Ben turned back to her from the front passenger seat. ‘Shut the window Kami. I can smell the dirt on those damn coolie tea pluckers!’ Eyes were dark with impatience and annoyance, he ran his fingers through his curly black hair. ‘This is the third bloody stop we’ve made. I would’ve never agreed to the detour through the stupid tea plantation if I’d known it would take so long. We’ll never get to the Nuwera Eliya Grand Hotel in time for dinner. In case you’ve forgotten, we’re meeting the chairmen of the medical association for dinner?’

Kami didn’t listen. She never did these days.

Swinging the back door open she leapt out of the car. Her Chloe leather boots sank into the wet mud at the edge of the gravel road. She stood facing the young coolie girl. Kami’s Calvin Klein jeans and Stella McCartney Jacket were a stark contrast with the green cotton sari, plastic apron and rubber slippers the girl wore.

‘Chinnamma<sup>1</sup>?’ The girl shifted the strap that held the tea basket to her head.

‘Parvati?’ Kami reached out her perfectly manicured hands and grasped the work worn hands of her childhood friend. Their eyes locked. Tears glistened on Kami’s lashes. They stood together remembering the last time they met.

Six years ago.

Kami’s mother had screamed at them both, ‘I should have known better than to let you be friends with a coolie *vesi*<sup>2</sup>. How dare you talk with her brother? I don’t care that he is a scholarship student attending school in Kandy. You will not *ever* mix with low caste Indian Tamils again. You’re going to study in Colombo. We have plans for you.’

The tears in her eyes were reflected in Parvati’s. ‘Your brother? Ram?’

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<sup>1</sup> Little madam

<sup>2</sup> Prostitute

Parvati's hands tightened in hers. 'He got into Medical School in Colombo, chinnamma, he got a special prize and is now in London studying to be a surgeon. He wants me to stop this work. But I am married here and happy. Maybe someday...'

'Is he...'

'No, chinnamma he is not married. But,' she glanced into the car, 'maybe now he will agree to get married.'

Ben's truculent voice – Sri Lankan with a crisp New York accent carried to them, harsh and insistent. 'Hurry up and get back in the car Kami. It's getting bloody cold in here.'

Kami hugged her friend and turned back to the car.

five years of an arranged marriage to a successful heart surgeon in New York. A luxury apartment on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, holidays in the Bahamas and Hawaii.

She was living the plans her parents had made for her.

If only it was that easy to forget.