

THE GOOD DIE YOUNG

ISHAANT NANDU

A Novel

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For all the readers in the world

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CHAPTER 1

THE GRAND IDEA

Captain Pavitri Goyal, who was beauty personified with flawless ivory skin as smooth as muslin, and wide blue eyes that made her look like she was deciding on how to kill you dropped on her soft, cozy cream-coloured couch, thinking about the recent sieges by the fierce Pakistanis, sipping on her strong coffee, which she had made on her own that Monday. She had long sable, silky hair, tied in a tight bun.

“Thirty seven successful raids by Pakistanis in just one and half month,” she grumbled. Just as she was reviewing similar warlike situations spread over almost every nook and corner of the world from her new smartphone, the old leather telephone with a vintage mahogany finish rang. She picked it up.

“Hello, this is Lieutenant Colonel Adarsh Bhartia, your presence is needed at Sector 51 on the Pakistan border immediately! Code 458 under section 5b.”

“Why didn’t you call me on my new phone?” Whined Pavitri.

“This isn’t the time,” he grumbled.

“Sure. Will comply. Permission for firearms?”spoke the captain.

“Full permission,” the phone spoke, as she slammed it down and went to another room. She picked up her sleek, jet-black Beretta Px4 Storm quickly, loaded a magazine in it, and ran towards the door and slammed it.

“Dang it! These Pakistanis,” she muttered with her gung-ho attitude, as she revved her very own green Kawasaki Ninja H2.

As she reached the border, she spotted some tall men with obsidian jackets and obfuscating masks. The jackets were

padded with green borders, and the words “PTDF” emblazoned in a dazzling viridian hue. She immediately aimed her Beretta at the leader.

“Get out my country, ruffians!” She declared.

“What you do now!?”

One of them took a fighting stance, slowly unsheathing a wickedly sharp Damascus poniard with a long, pointed edge. With no hesitation, she pulled the trigger, releasing a 9mm bullet right in the chest. Yet, the leader didn’t even bat an eye, and jumped. Panicking, the fair-skinned officer vaulted onto the bike and wrenched the throttle, releasing dust into the air, in the hopes of blinding the enemies.

Resting on the pearly couch the next day, she received another call on her phone.

“Hello, Lieutenant Colonel Adarsh Bhar-tia here. What you did was unacceptable,

you will be stripped of your rank later!
We'll have a meeting at Bhuj, at 8:30 AM,
Pizzalicious restaurant.”

She replied and took out her laptop to find the venue. As she opened it, a tenebrous screen with a video playing in the centre popped up. She tried to press different keys, but nothing could open the home screen.

“Hyuk! Hyuk! Oh how the tables have turned!” Spoke a nasal voice from her computer.

“Tomorrow, all weapons at the border, or bid adieu to your survival. Hyuk! Hyuk!”

Today was Holi, the Indian festival of colours, which would make coming on time a pipe dream. Nevertheless, she pulled out her green Kawasaki, and sped. The youngsters were doing something ingenious- they mixed the powdered colours in the water of the water-balloons and shot them at onlookers, with adamantine ener-

gy. Amidst the chaos, a grocery list fluttered on her head. It was written-

Drain cleaner Powder- 1x Balloons- 5x
Colour Powder- 5x

Note- Mix colour powder in water to put in balloons for Holi.

“EUREKA,” she exclaimed, as an idea sparked in her mind. She suddenly shifted her bodyweight to do a wheelie, attracting the attention of the kids, giving her a wide berth. She drifted into the parking lot, doing a stoppie.

“Showoff,” muttered the other officers. They stormed in the restaurant, a tiny one, with plump grey seats. They all ordered some strong Espresso to freshen them up.

“Speaking of the raid, what do you think we should do?” Said Adarsh, the one with a neatly-trimmed beard and an endless supply of leather jackets.

“Direct frontal assault, I guess,” spoke Ashish, another captain.

“They expect us surrender our weapons, Adarsh,” remarked the captain, attracting a collective snort.

“They have some bulletproof clothing. I think we follow this plan- we paint Pichhkaris (water guns) as Berettas, and take water balloons, and mix drain cleaner in water,” the captain opined.

“Have you lost your marbles,” exclaimed Ritesh, a major, creating a collective agreement on Pavitri’s slow-wittedness.

“Just listen me,” Pavitri declared. “When water balloons burst, they react with drain cleaner, destroys enemy flesh. The best part it leave the bulletproof jackets and the weapons unscathed. Pichhkaris confuse them.”

“I think her plan is nice,” said Ashish, while typing something on his phone.

“Fine, but if this Jugaad (MacGyvering in India) is any of your pranks, then you

will face the music, and this time it will be heavy metal,” muttered Ritesh, his sharp eyes piercing a hole through Pavitri’s.

CHAPTER 2

WATER BALLOONS VS PAKISTANIS

They sat in the cantonment grounds the next day with a sack full of drain cleaner from wholesale, and a prodigious amount of balloons, which attracted a whole lot of stares. Their olive-green khaki uniforms caught the attention of myriad people, it clearly contrasting with flamboyant surroundings which looked like an explosion. The ground had dry, cracked mud with a grudge against fauna.

“Let’s do this!” Adarsh shouted. They filled the balloons with water and put a prodigious amount of drain cleaner in it. Ashish tied it and when it started to heat, he dropped it, and the balloon burst open. It fizzed with extreme heat, spreading itself in a large area. As it hit the dry, cracked ground, it bubbled vigorously, creating a thick coating of alabaster foam, similar to a

bathtub. There was no escape, the deadly liquid trapped them at three sides, and the wall on the fourth.

“What was the part where it burns flesh,” he cried, as he observed his leather boot breaking down in front of him.

“We’ll burn ourselves before even meeting them!”

“What seems to be the problem?” said a youth, looking at the men with their heart in their mouths.

“Balloon filled with water, add drain cleaner, explosion. Sepoy training going happen here,” explained Pavitri.

“Wait a minute please,” said the boy. He brought lemons and sprinkled their juice all over the ground, creating a sudden noise, and leaving a white powder on the ground.

“You should mix water and drain-cleaner in a very small proportion. Add 5 grams of drain cleaner in 100 millilitres in water in a glass bottle.”

“Thank you, chemistry teacher,” smirked Ritesh.

Now, they had a plan, and a weapon; a lean, mean killing machine . They spent 2 hours of endless labour, their fingers chafed by tying knots, lachrymose eyes stinging with the resulting fumes. They furiously, mixed, measured, and made the lethal water-balloons.

The second the troops came, a jovial smile lit up Pavitri’s face.

“Attention, sepoys! You will learn how to wield water balloons for Mission S443MQ.” This statement by Adarsh attracted a lot of chatter.

“These balloons are filled with a deadly, poison-like substance, so don’t underestimate them,”announced Ritesh.

“Stand behind bush, wait for signal, and throw,” explained Pavitri. The sceptical troops seemed to understand.

At precisely 6am, Ashish's soft alarm clock with a pastel body woke him up. He was the definition of a night owl, with his wavy brown hair and his caramel skin sticky and sweaty. Pavitri was more of a morning person, when she woke up earlier to have a shower, letting her ethereal Japanese features scintillate herself. Nevertheless, they assembled at the cantonment, along with six stripling soldiers. They smuggled their secret weapons into gunny sacs, pretending them to be oversized taters.

"Let's go! Remember to stay stealthy, or Pavitri's plan will be foiled by her own side," said a macho Ashish. They stumbled in a local train, with T-shirts instead of uniforms. The train was dingy, and dirty, with cockroaches all around, and muck and grunge-stained walls and floors.

"Why can't we travel in first class? This general compartment is killing my nose by the stench," grumbled Ritesh.

“Because we need to be stealthy, and we aren’t wealthy,” laughed Adarsh, due to his lame rhyme.

The entire team kept their fake guns at the border, with the soaring sun’s effulgent light heating the terrain like a pressure cooker. The plan was simple, seek and destroy. Most of them concealed themselves behind velvet mesquite bushes, natively called “Baval”. Again, the PTDF came with their jackets and ski-masks.

“Hyuk! Hyuk!” The leader mocked, with a half-savage smile curling at the end of his lips.

“Thank you. Your Kawasakis also look new too... We’ll see about that.”

“That was’t part of deal, boor,” announced Pavitri angrily. She discreetly tapped her left heel slowly, and then another short tap was seen, signalling “n” in morse code. Then, she slowly tapped three times, showing “o”. To the enemy, it was a

nervous tic, but to the others, it was a signal.

“Wouldn’t mind you also, we could use a new soldier, Hyuk! Hyuk!” taunted the Pakistani’s general as Pavitri shifted her weight to tap one time softly and another time loudly, spreading dust, while signalling “W”.

“What are you gonna do, cry you.”

His insult was stopped when the Indians threw their water-balloons, guided when the captain signalled “Now”. For anyone, laughing at the utter stupidity of something that will kill you, is never a good idea, but nevertheless that was the Pakistanis’ last words. They vociferously hollered in mortal pain as the lye tore their flesh apart, giving no mercy to the skin, but forgiving their wide tapestry of daggers, knives, SIG Sauer guns, and their bullet-proof Kevlar clothing. Their skin was bubbling vigorously, burning their very skin like a heated knife.

“That’s what you get!” Screamed Ashish and Adarsh. They carefully picked up the guns, and clothing, leaving the carcasses behind, in the wild.

CHAPTER 3

COUNTERATTACK

Back at the headquarters in Bhuj, they commemorated the success of Pavitri's antic plans.

"Here's a toast to the success of Pavitri," cheered Lieutenant Colonel Adarsh Bhartia.

"Three cheers for her. Hip, Hip, Hurray!"

They drank buttermilk and ate scrumplicious food- a flat millet bread accompanied with perfectly roasted aubergine. She got a silver medal with a central star embossed on it, with the words "Science Warrior" emblazoned on it. The best part was that she was now promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, skipping the rank of Major entirely!

"Thanks, this is more than I deserve. After all, it is the power of Jugaad that in our blood!"

“Since when did you improve your English,” asked Ritesh politely.

“My turgid vocabulary has been created through academic excellence. I took classes. Ashish would know.”

They waited for Ashish to reply, and then realised that he wasn't there. A message from an unknown number appeared on her phone.

“Good try, but the NaOH had some impurities...

Iodine - Neon - Einsteinium - Dysprosium - Tungsten - Erbium - Arsenic - Phosphorus - Oxygen - Nitrogen - Sulphur or KCN will go into the Ash of Ish. The place is the Boron oxouranonitrodarmstadtate after xviii”

This left a puzzling look on the crew. Pavitri took out a piece of paper and scribbled down in rough handwriting, using a black pen she had got.

“I NeEDy WErAsPONS or Pottasium Cianade will go to Ashish. The place is BOUNDS after 19”

“They need our weapons at the bounds, or they will do something,” muttered Adarsh half-heartedly.

“They will kill him, and by bounds, they refer to to the boundary. We have about 19 days.”

Dejected, they decided to go back, and they left the venue to infinite dust.

Pavitri sat at her village’s communal library, dusty cerulean walls enclosed her in a claustrophobic space. Suddenly, an old book fell down, having no words on the cover, just a tobobo parchment . She decided to read it.

“There must needs be great times of war, that thou dost peruse these words. Thy only path to salvation liveth in con-

juring the elixir of humanity, the chrysopoeia, the panacea.”

She was so beguiled that she almost fell on her head. She pinched her arm and read it again and again in disbelief. Next to it was a cipher of some kind, having weird symbols in loopy handwriting with long, vertical lines and circular components. There also were detailed paintings of plants with totally unrelated captions such as “boiling” or “mixing”

“What in the world is this,” she thought aloud as she decided to read forward.

“Asphalt, pronounced ass-fault, not asp-halt, is a standard form of pavement across many roads”

She closed the book and decided to retreat into her cozy 1BHK abode not far by on the ragged, rustic roads.

As she was trudging along the sandy path, she found a message sent by Ashish a second ago.

“can esc. no time. i hrd that main guy gonna cum inn bidra. if u kaptur i can esc. show dis 2 oter.”

“So the kingpin is committing suicide...”

Her lips turned into a primitive, savage smile, her eyes widened with faux excitement masking anger.

“What I don’t know, is why Ashish asked me if my laptop was perfectly charged and working, and if I had internet on Monday. Or maybe I do! That goody-two-shoe,” exclaimed Pavitri.

“Too bad,” said a voice behind her. He quickly thrust his Damascus knife close to her throat.

“Get in the van, if you value your life.”

Pavitri hesitantly followed. He threw her phone in the gutter, a hefty lakh spent in vain, thrown into the depths of betrayal. The man removed his mask, and it turned out to be Ashish.

“Hey! You can’t just throw my phone like that, you bloody traitor!”

“Uhh, I got a new phone for you, and I wanted to see the condition of your crusty old laptop. I’m not the traitor.”

“And why would it be like that? Really,” replied Pavitri, pushing the knife towards his throat.

“I w-w-wanted t-to gift you s-s-something. The m-mobile was i-infected with Stuxnet.”

As if on cue, the mobile in the gutter heated, and created a grotesque fountain of garbage.

“I believe you,” she said in a soft manner.

“What else do you know?”

He droned on about torture with snake whips, forced labour, and how they'd release him to be a traitor. She was a good listener, and understood why he had attacked her.

“And also, I found this book,” he showed her another tobrobo book, with the same weird letters as the other one and the words “Voynich Manuscript, MS408”embossed on it. She quickly ran to the library with a jocund gait, with Ashish driving behind her. She quickly deciphered the writing.

“There must needs be great times of war, that thou dost peruse these words. Thy only path to salvation liveth in conjuring the elixir of humanity, the chrysopoeia, the panacea with thy ingredients unto equal proportion. Thy first ingredient is the fourth gift to baby Jesus. Find it in the Gutenberg Bible, read withe thy rock khrystal.”

“Wait, this doesn’t make sense, lemme call the rest of the team, Pavitri”

Now instead of two, there were four heads bending over, puzzled as can be.

“Balderdash. Useless. Just focus on the army,” growled Adarsh.

“If you don’t believe this, please leave me alone.”Pavitri’s words were put to effect as Ritesh and Adarsh stormed out. Their effort went down the drain, but too many cooks spoil the broth.

CHAPTER 4

JINX

For obvious reasons, Ashish and Pavitri quit their job. They decided to sit in Ashish's favourite coffee shop in Gandhidham, Gujarat. It had brick walls, pastel lemon seats, and crossing patterns on the ceiling. Ashish wore a simple t-shirt while Pavitri wore a jet-black blazer, grey slacks and a white bodysuit.

“Why are you wearing such formal clothes?” Asked Ashish.

“I'll explain later. Where should we find a Gutenberg Bible, perhaps in USA?” Questioned Pavitri. As if on cue, a cyclone system progressed its way through America, making many possible options slashed.

“This sounds too jinxing. It might've been a coincidence. Isn't there a one at Japan?”

“Breaking news, there’s a typhoon attacking Japan.”

“Ohh. I really want a French fry. I guess you know what I mean.”

“Sure. There’s a strong gale blocking flights in Belgium. I sure do want a good baguette. Let me just book a business class ticket on Air France,” suggested Pavitri. She rapidly typed on her phone, and got a good ticket. They slept in a dharamshala, a clean one that boasted cheap prices and free food. As Ashish was sleeping, she read the book a little bit more.

“The Deities of Olde did sow the Partial Ichor, bending the Weave of Tyme whilst yielding the Expanse of Space, thus begetting the Faiths of Men. Yet the True Magickal Serum is the inheritance of the Deceas'd Mortall alone; it holdeth dominion over Terra as a mere trifle, whilst harbouring Potential without End.”

“Wow, I guess I’ll have to consider which one I want,” remarked Pavitri, drifting off on a white futon.

The plain was an ever-popular Boeing 747, with its signature width, and cotton seats. The team had packed minimally, so they hardly had any hassle at the airport.

“Hey, so the book mentioned about having two serums, a partial one giving me control over some area’ making a religion of some sort,” said Pavitri, nestled in a window seat, providing a picturesque view in the middle of her bickering.

“The other one lets me control Earth itself.”

“What will power over a nation do in a world war, just that you must remove your ego for the other one.”

They relaxed and rejuvenated, slurping cans of gourmet Italian tomato

soup, garnished with parmesan and fresh basil.

“Where did you get that locket?” Enquired Ashish.

“Let me tell you a story. There once was a mystical family, the heir was a youthful and energetic lad. He was the kingpin of economy, making an honest empire unknown to but a few. His orchidaceous visage attracted a lissom, voluptuous maiden from the depths of the imperial residence of Kyoto, Japan. The heir inherited a strange, passed-down heirloom of a zenzizenzic age, and of preternatural parables of sesquipedalian grandiloquence. It was a four hundred carat polished gem, made of pure rock crystal, along with a mysterious book to never be opened except for tidings of extreme warfare. The effervescent colleen along with the nonchalant gentleman made a pulchritudinous pair, with no trace of surreptitiousness. In the shadowed narthex, leading to the clandes-

tine halls, a juggernaut incendiary device was planted. As the newly-wedded couple strode, their jocund gait turned into swift running, extirpating the male, but leaving their twins alone. The pregnant woman died in ineffable grief. Her little waif was later ruefully enslaved by Pakistani bandits, her tiny wrists cramped with gyves as she passed age eight and a staggering 200 IQ, imbibing warfare knowledge. Yet a serendipitous encounter upon a dirigible allowed her to be part of the Indian phalanx, rapidly scaling ranks. Now both eldritch vestiges are possessed by her.”

“Uhm, can you please speak English?”

“Ok, so my rich dad married a knockout-gorgeous Japanese woman from a royal family, but they died in a bomb blast. Their daughter was enslaved by the Pakistanis when she was six, for twelve years. She was a child genius, so she didn’t need education, but they taught her warfare tactics. she met a man on a plane who

let her join the army, and the mysterious book and the locket are her timeless heirlooms,” the twenty-year-old quietly wept.

“That girl is me.”

“Wow! You’re so stoic about it.”

“Excuse me, could Miss Goyal hand out her locket,” said an unfamiliar voice.

“No.”

Every single passenger, along with the eerily-smiling air hostesses pulled out a derringer, and aimed it at Pavitri. They loaded the guns in one single collective motion, their hands stretching to the point blank range. A asymmetrical, vile grin grew upon her face, matching the one of the hostesses’. She furtively shifted towards the exit, wearing a rucksack on the front, and another backpack touching her back, gesturing Ashish to do the same.

“Please hand it over, or we will paint the plane red.”

“Fire. Shoot. I don’t care,” retorted Pavitri. They were too happy to oblige with

this foolhardy girl. She and Ashish jumped off the plane with parachutes via a previously unlocked door. The soaring wind filled their ears, plummeting at approximately 200 kilometres per hour; terminal velocity, while the bullets flew in the direction of few unlucky birds.

“Yeah!” They hollered in excitement, as their yellow parachutes opened, passing through many clouds. The G-force made their stomachs churn like the ocean, and the overall experience pumped their adrenaline to the maximum. They slowly wafted towards the seashore, ground, landing at the Deauville beach in France. They landed in the azureturpelean water with a loud splash, wetting their new clothes.

CHAPTER 5

ALLIES

The beach was almost deserted, with a plethora of colourful umbrellas planted in the ground in a uniform pattern. Pavitri took out her sleek phone and called an Uber, also booking an appointment with the immigration office.

“All done, now let’s go to the Bibliothèque museum, where there’s a bible,” said Pavitri.

“ Sure.”

They climbed into a dark blue jeep with comfy chestnut seats and stereo.

“Where would mademoiselle Goyal like to go?” Asked the driver with a heavy accent.

“Bibliothèque museum, please,” said Ashish.

“You know, I just grew up in a completely normal village family.”

They reached the museum, which was strangely deserted, except a teenager wearing a black polo with gold buttons, a signet ring, shorts, and a fierce visage.

“Why are you here,” she asked.

“Uhm, I’m a tourist,” said Ashish.

“WRONG. The tourist season is over, and bookings are even more expensive.”

“Let me handle this,” said Pavitri.

“You see, we’re kind of pilgrims. We want to see the Gutenberg bible which is the oldest bible.”

“Wrong. There are older bibles,” said the girl. She pulled out a brand new Remington RP9, and aimed it at Ashish.

“Get out of here,” she retorted.

“Wrong,” said Pavitri.

“First, you’re not gonna do anything to us with that jammy gun, secondly, you’ve never shot before, there are beads of sweat rolling down your face. Secondly, you’ve put a .22 caliber in a 9mm gun. Finally,

we're former trained military personnel, so what are you going to do?"

The teen pulled Pavitri's shirt slightly down, revealing her locket.

"Come with me," she whispered, leading them into the museum. She went to the Rotunda gallery, and asked the staff for a key. She put the key into a mask, opening a secret passageway from a broken tile in the museum floor. They quickly went in. Evenly-placed flambeaux on the walls of the passage led the way to a central platform with winding stairs that seemed to go down to the centre of the earth. They scampered all the way down, to reveal a cylindrical room with weird looking machines made of high quality matte white plastic, an alabaster floor and some atrocious looking metal tools that unsettled the intrepid duo. The lab looked like a dentist's clinic, a torture dungeon, and a nuclear collider all combined. It contained esoteric

apparatus, and a hospital-like bed, and then a central cloaked figure appeared.

“Wow, good job Serena. I’m afraid it will be the last,” the figure mocked in a low, hoarse voice. It plunged a wickedly sharp Damascus poniard into Serena’s thigh. It felt like a red-hot poker. She moaned and screamed like crazy.

“I’m sorry, they forced me to,” cried the same teenager.

“Who forced you?” Asked Pavitri softly, but the cloaked, lackadaisical man had gagged her, and sent her to somewhere else. Also she couldn’t see Ashish. The haunting figure wearing a Guy Fawkes mask stared directly into her eyes.

“Give me that locket runnion, or you’re next,” he smiled, injecting melatonin

CHAPTER 6

SHOCK

Pavitri woke up and saw herself wearing an abrasive crop-top T-shirt and shorts made of itchy, white wool in the cold. There were some thin, rectangular blocks attached to her lips horizontally which were anchored by plastic aligners and stretched her visage into a cruel smile. They had powerful electromagnets. Each of her limbs' ends were attached to some sort of cuff that connected to a hollow, cylindrical material, that held her hands and feet tight. These cylindrical thingamajigs were connected to a frame on the vertical bed, like a torture rack, making her unable to move, along with lots of chains. Her long hair was braided and tied to the ceiling, as she was very tall. There was a metal collar on her neck with spikes inside, attached to chains.

“Well, it’s light’s out, girl,” said the man, putting a metal blindfold on her eyes, while turning off the electromagnets on her lips so she could speak.

“How come you haven’t taken the locket yet?”

“Have you watched Castle In The Sky, the Ghibli film,” he said.

“Yes.”

“So, we need you to use the locket to help us. Just say ‘I and my locket are owned by V. By the way, if you want to know, all of these are made using tungsten carbide.’”

She knew that tungsten carbide was a hard material, second to diamonds.

“Oh,” she thought.

“So it is impossible to break these.”

“No, you aren’t gonna say it?”

Laughed V. He turned on the electro-magnet by flipping a switch; muting her defiance. Then, he uncoiled a heavy leather scourge with metal spikes and whipped her

a lot until blood came. Her wounds bled, and V let her speak.

“C’mon. You don’t want this anymore. Its just a stone.”

“Are you sure about that? I could do this all day.” She said, spitting out blood. After three rounds of this painful practice, nothing happened to them.

“Guess it’s time to step up the game, señorita,” smiled V. He took out two large electrodes with clips, and put the positive one on her arm. Then, he put the negative electrode on her leg on the other side.

“Let’s see how you feel after this.”

He dialed the ZVS driver circuit to a million volts, capping fifty micro amps for a brief yet intense second. Her entire body contracted rapidly. There was blood everywhere, as she started crying and hollering, shrieking in pain. The electricity sped though her body, trying to destroy its passage as life flashed before her covered eyes. Severe red burns appeared on her skin.

V had made a fatal mistake in his pride-tungsten carbide is extremely strong but very brittle on impact. The extreme kinetic force of Pavitri's spasms broke the gyves. Hard, brittle shrapnel flew all across the black room, and on V's eye.

"Tit for tat," she mocked. Pavitri's face grew with an evil smile, as now it was V's turn to be in pain. In her short-lived triumph, blinded by rage and pain, he backstabbed Pavitri with an anaesthesia syringe on her coccyx. Then, her world went black.

CHAPTER 7

MOVING ON

Serena and Ashish were relaxing in a hotel room. It had soft, white beds, elegant slate-grey walls, and pure luxury at its finest.

“Do you know the man?”

“V is my master,” said Serena.

“We should worry, but not approach Pavitri at this stage.”

“Why?”

“Once, there was a man who he captured. His brother came to rescue him, but his entire family was forced into hard labour, and that is V’s nice side. He will probably ship her live body to some corner of the world.”

They decided to read the Voynich further.

“Thy third and last element doth rest within thy main ingredient to the Indian rope trick. ”

A ring came from the doorbell. It was room service. The man gave complimentary chocolate croissants and caesar salad, but they smelled a little bit off. The room service guy then took out a paper knife and put it at their throats. Ashish took out his Beretta and aimed it back. The man ran away.

“You see, it wasn’t even made of metal, thanks to Pavitri. By the way, these look like code. What if we reverse them?”

He furiously scribbled “Jiuqqiv Jcllpi” on the hotel notepad.

“No use,” said Serena.

“This caesar salad is really good”

“Isn’t their a caesar cipher,” asked Ashish. He used a craft knife to make one,

and finally found out the message through-
“Bamiyan Buddha”

“The only problem is that it doesn’t exist anymore, and Taliban are too bad,” said Serena.

“We need to go, Pavitri’s counting on us.”

A no-reply email reached Ashish’s eyes. It was a ransom video, demanding for twelve million euros for Pavitri. There was a long video of her being strapped to a wall, all ghostly and pale. There was a tic in her left leg.

“Wait, what if she’s signalling in morse code?” Asked Ashish.

She quietly noted it down.

“No go Afghan fr Bamiyan, buk in Brmu-
da sunk boat. I am slave again do not
worry or you will b next 77 550098, 8
034353 no go”

“Oh, so we need to travel in the
Bermuda Triangle,” whined Serena.

“No, we shouldn’t go.”

“Let’s stay here.”

CHAPTER 8

PAIN

Pavitri knew what was going to happen from past experience. She was again in the same clothes as before. But, she was somewhere else. V always tranquillised her at 10:00 PM and she woke up at 7:00 am the next day, but it was noon according to the clock. Also, the clock had Kanji letters, confirming that she was in Japan.

“I have bought you from the Pakistanis,” said V from a computer speaker in the wall. Pavitri got instantly annoyed of hearing her captors, but she decided to play it cool.

“You have attracted many Yakuza to buy you as a slave, due to your attractive looks. So, you are on sale. In some time, you will meet your new master. Oh, and if your little friends go the the Bermuda Triangle, I have a little surprise for them.”

The line went dead, and a man came inside.

“Hello I am Sora Sirojiko. I am your master,” said the man in slow English, with full-body tattoos.

“Kon'nichiwa, Sora-sama. Katte kudasatte arigatōgozaimasu,” said Pavitri with a smile in fluent Japanese, which translates to “Hello Sora. Thank you for buying me.”

Sora was stunned.

“Tell me why you bought me, and your rank,” said Pavitri.

“Oh, she’s got some nerve. I am the *Kumicho* or chairman of Kizuna-Kai; a yakuza syndicate. I bought you as revenge against your mother; she arrested half of my brothers- the yakuza, and also because I love to see damsels in distress.”

He forcefully dragged her into a corner, and trapped her in Skevington’s gyves. It was an ‘A’ shaped metal device which had a hoop at the apex for the head; which closed fully when locked, and the two di-

verging rods had loops to keep her wrists and ankles in place, crushing the limbs together. The hands were between the legs and the head, and the legs' arcs were connected horizontally. He put nose plugs in her nose, and earphones in her ear. It played a 19 hertz tone, making her nauseous and uncomfortable, and wanting her to throw up.

“Please, master. Please can I help you in any other way?” She begged.

To silence her nagging voice, he put a macabre scold's bridle on her, a cruel metal mask-like contraption that pulled the tongue using screws and spikes along with being a gag; the pen defeats the sword. It also stretched her face in a cruel smile.

“Try not to die in here, darling,” jeered Sora, taking out a velvet box something like one used for storing engagement rings. He took two lens-like objects. He forced her eyes open, and put them on her eyes.

They had tiny metal cylinders on them, which attached themselves to the mask

“These are scleral lenses which are attached to your eye. Even if you close your eye, you still will see it. In case you have the wrong idea, this is made from an alloy of tungsten, molybdenum and titanium. Also, I feel that it's too easy, so I'm going to add constant AC current for a shocking experience, according to my sadistic needs. This will continue until you give up your locket, and tell me why you've gone to France.”

He pressed a button on a remote. powerful current surged through Pavitri's body. Her muscles cramped in contraction, her eyes bulging with fear, but not seen.

“Sayonara, Baka!” He laughed. He tied the bridle's chains and her hair to the ceiling, in the intention of slowly tearing it apart, though it held

“How should I escape?” thought Pavitri. She first widened her eyes to the maxi-

mum, removing the scleral lens. Then, she stretched her mandible, and then yanked her tongue. She tensed her skin, and clenched it. Slowly but steadily, she removed her body from the contraption. Harry Houdini couldn't've done better.

CHAPTER 9

HUMILLIATION

“Oh, you cunning, vile beast; impersonating Harry Houdini,” scolded Sora the next day, while Pavitri followed with faux puppy eyes.

“Fine.”

“You have to serve hors d’oeuvres and cocktails in a Yakuza party organised by me. Another varlet of mine will guide you.”

A pretty girl about the same age- nineteen came in the room. She introduced herself as Taira Hanako.

“See, so when you are serving food, you have to stand tall. When someone wants to pick the food, you have to curtsy like this,” she said in a stoic manner. She gritted her teeth, but after some practicing she got it right.

The cruise ship was a leviathan behemoth crafted from hydrodynamic steel, reinforced by titanium rivets and a titanium hull. She wore a humiliating dress which consisted of a fluffy white headband, a brown frilly skirt with white edges, and a tobobo blouse with white sleeves and bibs, along with pink bracelets.

There were fairy lights everywhere, in an aesthetic manner. White seats made of alpaca hide adorned the venue, along with premium veneer floorboards, giving a luscious effect. Long, slender and curved white metal roofs adorned the top of the multi-level ship on the edges, without ambient lighting below; it was the dead of the night. A geodesic arrangement of tempered glass adorned the centre pavilion. Costly abstract art pieces hung from smooth walls, while the open edges provided a panoramic view of the calm ocean.

There was a semicircular table made of costly marble with a wall behind at one

end, containing many aged drink bottles. In the centre of the bar, stood a bartender, making complex drinks in a dynamic way, using a variety of syrups, glasses and flowers. At the other end, there was an exquisite buffet serving sumptuous viands, including global comestibles such as meals prepared with caviar or foie gras, using real silver casseroles and chafing dishes.

She was handed a tray with truffle vol-au-vents, and she slowly scampered her way to the senior table.

“Oniisan,” she squeaked directly at one VIP, meaning brother.

“What kind of delusions is your maid having, Sora?” The person she pointed at laughed.

“Come with me,” he said furiously.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

He took her to a secluded room with thick walls.

“You always have to attract trouble, do you, punk,” he snarled, taking out a whip

which had barbed and curved metal tips, just like fishing hooks. He used a tanto sword to slice her 'maid' clothes, revealing the same outfit from before. He took out a pressurised bottle of pure resiniferatoxin mixed with powdered salt, and attached it to the handle of the whip; it had an attachment for such a bottle. Resiniferatoxin is a natural powder which is more hot or spicy than anything else in the world.

"This is my all-new whip," fumed Sora. He handcuffed her, chaining the loops of the cuffs to the ceiling, along with gagging her. He lashed out his crazy contraption, lacerating her integument. He pressed a button, and resiniferatoxin; the pure spiciness acquired from a plant, and salt lashed out on her bare wounds. Her round, crystalline eyes watered in despair, due to the effective mixture and mortal pain, agonising the depths of her soul, for the resiniferatoxin overpowered her sense of heat. Her locket was swinging in its chain.

As to her horror, she saw a small red light flashing, meaning this barbarism was filmed.

“Please forgive me, master. I shall never do this again,” cried Pavitri. Just as she was going to accept defeat mentally, a chilling voice sent a shiver down her spine.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing with my attractive slave, filming her, you bloody boor! Have you no sense of decency filming torture, the police will catch us”

He, like a true gentleman, unlocked the door though a well-executed kick, and held a 9mm Automatic pistol at Sora’s head, while picking up Pavitri in another hand, shocking her. Sora pulled out another gun, aiming it at the man. He was the same one Pavitri.

CHAPTER 10

UNCERTAINTY

The man who held Pavitri ran, on the Shonan beach, and into a legendary Nissan

GT Supercar, shoving Pavitri into the shotgun seat. The car was very streamlined, and in a red colour.

“Sorry, I’m Uyeda Shoko, and I actually bought you from the Pakistanis, now buckle your seats unless you want to relive what that idiot Sora did to you,” he chuckled, noticing that the others were behind him, catching up. They buckled up, and Uyeda revved his heavily modified car, into the Tokyo streets. Sora climbed into his Mazda RX7.

The chase was on. They drive with extreme precision, missing cars by centimetres. They rapidly jerked the wheel, and the pedals. Uyeda did a Tokyo drift, clearing the road. They weaved through the surrounding traffic, like braiding hair. They whizzed at 200 km/h, with extreme precision, The G-force almost ripped Pavitri’s stomach apart. When they reached Shibuya Crossing, Uyeda, having the better vehicle, sped into another road, while Sora

couldn't, as a typhoon erupted, and now, there was a traffic jam, and a vehicle was struck. That vehicle was Uyeda's.

The vehicle was now unidentifiable except for red metal. Pavitri and Uyeda were outside.

“Let's take shelter, Uyeda-sama” said Pavitri in absolute respect, due to the previous events. Uyeda led her to a warehouse, putting her in a bed face-down, but put her head in the air with a monitor below for her to see. Suddenly, an injection pierced her skin, making her unable to move, yet she saw what was going on. First, some herbal paste was put on the wounds, which healed that day. A surgeon cut open her lower back, namely the tailbone, and slowly removed some kind of circuitry she didn't know existed. But, removing the circuit board was painful, as many blood vessels had wrapped around it.

“This won't work, should we try plan B,” asked the surgeon. Uyeda approved.

The surgeon took out a bottle labeled “Oil Of Vitriol”. Balls of sweat fell from her forehead.

“Are they going to use Sulphuric Acid,” she thought in fear as the surgeon used a dropper to put the acid. The effect was instantaneous; the blood vessels fizzled as they got obliterated. Then, she put some baking soda, reducing the effect. Then, the skin was put back, and the chip was extracted.

“I am so sorry, but it had to be done,” said Uyeda, whilst also throwing the chip into a sewer. The effect of the injection went away, so Pavitri asked,

“Why are you so kind to me, and why did it need to be done, and why did you put a monitor below.”

“Let me answer the former first. So, when you were captured by Sora, and unconscious, he put a PCB in your tailbone as a backup measure, so in case anything goes wrong, it can track your position, and has

nitroglycerin, so it can kill you. I put up the TV to gain your trust.”

“Why do you want to gain my trust, I am your slave, can’t you just order me to do what you want to,” asked Pavitri, her innards boiling with curiosity. She put on a red T-shirt, and shorts.

“I am not like Sora, I am not sadistic. Ever since I was born, I was alone. The loneliness is killing me. I can’t do therapy or hire someone, as that will make me the laughingstock of the Yakuza. I cannot get a lover, as I fear they might communicate to the Yakuza. I was forced into it, and I want to retire, but I have nothing to do,” said the 20-year-old.

“So I’m your therapy slave,” asked Pavitri.

“Yes.”

“Well, than can you do a favour to me, and join my adventure, we’re finding a recipe for stopping the current wars,” she said gingerly.

“I decrypted the Voynich manuscript, which requires the Gutenberg bible, to find one ingredient.”

“That is impressive. I have a copy of the Gutenberg Bible. If you must know, America is competing with Russia, China and India in a cold-war race, but instead testing the weapons on each other’s grounds.”

She nodded.

“Well, I accept your offer; I am particularly good at combat and transport; but you must be my attendant until I say so. You can display opinions, but mine matters more. Your position will be like a vassal.”

“Why do you want me to still be your servant, even if I’ve gained your trust?”

“I don’t want to get on your adventure, just to be marooned, and also I am a former Yakuza, your, and your mother’s enemies. So where are these friends of yours?”

“Paris. I don’t think I might accept your offer,” said Pavitri, backing away slowly.

“It’s for the best. Let me be clear, you have absolutely no choice; you are still my slave. You won’t experience any extreme torture, and you will have personal belongings. Just that your major actions will be influenced by me. You can do what you want or like with my permission, unless I die or I disapprove. I swear to god that I will not put your life in threat, unless you want it yourself, or if I need to be saved. You will also be freed of slavery, just any major decisions will be taken care of by me. You will also get about two million”

“Ok, I accept the terms, on the condition that you can’t make rash decisions,” said Pavitri, signing an unofficial agreement contract.

“I understand you too well. Even I face extreme loneliness,” said Pavitri.

“Also, I am doing this as protection from Sora, and others. The global underworld, like the Yakuza and Mafia still follow the slave system, with rules. You are my slave in name, but you have liberty; so unless they are foolish enough to want to confront an ex-Yakuza, they will leave you alone.”

“Thank you, Uyeda Sama,” she said.

CHAPTER 11

REUNION

Ashish was having a gala time in Uyeda’s plane. It had a black marble interior, and premium recliners.

“Don’t you want to use the entertainment devices,” asked Uyeda, who

picked them up for France, and was going to the coordinates Pavitri had given in the video message, sitting behind.

“No thanks,” said Serena. They were all engaging in small-talk.

“You’re so pretty Pavitri,” said Ashish.

“I guess you covered your skin with clothing so no one would see it.”

“Yes. That’s why I always wore multiple-layered shirts.”

“Wow, these people are so happy without entertainment,” thought Uyeda, whilst sitting near them to talk.

“So why don’t you tell us your origins,” said Pavitri.

“I was born in a French criminal family, with abusive parents, who rotted in jail. Alone, I was sold as a slave to V, until you rescued me,” said Serena.

“I just grew up in a completely normal family, and went to the army. By chance, I met you guys,” said Ashish.

“My parents were murdered in a bomb blast, and they had some weird handloom. Also, I think one of them was Indian or something. I was forced into the Yakuza, from which I retired now, by gang members.”

Pavitri stared at him, and then pulled him into a tight hug.

“Yes, you’re my twin brother. I’m also half Japanese, and half Indian. I also have weird handlooms, but that makes our situation more weird.”

“Really? Well, a brother holding her sister a slave is not acceptable,” he said.

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN HOLDING HER SLAVE?” Said Ashish in shock.

“Uhm, It’s best I explain this,” said Pavitri.

“So, V sold me to a Yakuza member called Sora, who was an abusive sadist,” she said.

“Well, one day I had to serve hors d’oeuvres, and I accidentally mistook an-

other senior Yakuza member for my brother, so he laughed at me and Sora, so he absolutely tanned my hide with his whip that had sharp fishing hooks on the edge, along with spraying salt and chemicals on my wounds. Uyeda burst in and just saved me. He nursed me to health, and took out a chip Sora had inserted to track my GPS position, and to blow me up on command. I told Uyeda to join this adventure, and he agreed, but on the condition that I would still be his vassal. See, I was already his slave, as he had purchased me from the Pakistanis, so he said I would still be his slave, in name, but I have more rights, like a vassal, but I have to follow his orders on big decisions, and also help him with loneliness.”

“I free you of slavery, and being my vassal, sister. You still will be my slave in name, as then many criminal gangs will not approach you,” said Uyeda.

“Sure. Also, I’ve outsmarted V. I told you not to go to the Bermuda Triangle, which V would’ve assumed that you did it, and he set up a trap for us there. While he is waiting patiently, we actually had to go somewhere else.”

“By the way, I would like to introduce my adopted sister, Pavitri’s surgeon, Dr Sakura Kurasaki.”

Pavitri pulled Sakura into a hug.

“It’s been so long, best friend.”

“Yeah. I missed you a lot.”

Right on cue, the plane started falling downwards, followed by shrieking.

CHAPTER 12

KUMARI KANDAM

They landed with a splash in the water. Thankfully, the plane was still upright.

“Uyeda, do you have scuba diving suits? Also, feel free to call me Kyochikuto,” she gushed (her nickname from her mother).

“Yes, Kyo. It’s in the same room you are in.”

“What kind of villain lair is this,” asked Serena, pulling neoprene jumpsuits, and oxygen tanks. After voting, Ashish and Serena would go down to search for clues.

“Let’s go,” said Serena, on the intercom connected to the plane’s. They successfully landed in a temple. Yet, whitetip sharks kept on bashing them.

“We’ve got blood, they’ve got blood. HELP,” said Serena.

“I’ve got this,” said Uyeda, but Pavitri stopped him.

“Swim somewhere else.”

They did so, and the sharks left them unmolested.

“Stay there for a lifetime,” she deadpanned, so they came up.

“The key to discovering the serum, is to look on overlooked things. The second ingredient is skin,” said Pavitri. Applause followed.

“The first ingredient is potassium.”

“How do you know?” Asked Sakura.

“See, I stole a page from a Gutenberg bible in France, and hid it in a capsule, behind my teeth. The thing is, I’ve been hiding too much from you all.”

Everyone stared at Pavitri.

“My name is Pavitri Karani, not Goyal. And this isn’t even my real voice.”

She started talking in a higher pitch.

“Also, this body is mine, but my eyes are different.”

She pulled out contacts, which revealed her eyes to be hazel.

“That’s all. My parents told me to protect my identity, and so did I.”

“Now, it’s my turn,” said Uyeda. He removed his contacts to show hazel eyes.

“My name isn’t Uyeda Shoko, I am Uyeda Karani.”

“So all this was a lie?”

“No. We still have a lot to do. Let’s read forward. The temple was a red her-ring, according to sonar scans, it is a mau-
oselum”

“vjwbjaxejamaxfwbnavbcjkrurbnb
Wukpmoktdrblbxppaeupmgamfhhvrs 9
onion tomato potato”

“What is this?”

“Uhm, sorry, that’s in the end,” said Ashish.

“Thy third and last element doth rest within thy main ingredient to the Indian rope trick,” he read.

“I read somewhere that the rope trick originated in Tamil which means that we might find it here,” crowed Pavitri.

“Deploy the sonar scanners,” beseeched Serena. The sub-aquatic scanners searched for a minute underwater, and pinged results of a book labelled “Rope Magic” near the mausoleum.

“Can I go,” asked Uyeda. Everyone approved. He did a flawless dive, and disappeared into the water. He returned with a book, covered with heavy wool. Wool has a waxy, waterproof substance

“Let’s read this.”

“To prepare this, take rope made of human hair, which is pulled. It must be at least three cubits long. Then apply Silphium and Nerium paste on it in equal proportions.”

Everyone stared at Pavitri.

“So, we’re supposed to mix human hair with two pastes?” Asked Sakura.

“No. We’re supposed to mix oleander with silphium. What is silphium?”

“It is an extinct plant found in Libya,” said the human dictionaries; Pavitri and Uyeda.

“Wait, so now it is impossible to find it?”

They decided to read ahead.

“If there is no silphium, mix urea and alum with the blood obtained from the Solar Plexus by using a sword or knife made of steel.”

“There! We have our solution, but who is willing to draw the blood,” asked Ashish.

“I am. Pain is like nothing to me,” said Pavitri, taking out a bottle. She walked into the medical bay, and slowly put a syringe, drawing blood from her chest. She removed it with such excellence, that there was no more blood bleeding.

“Here,” she showed them a sealed bottle of blood. It was double of what they

needed. She also had stored potassium in two ampules.

“Keep this, Serena,” she gave her the potassium.

“I trust you enough, and also you may give it to Sakura if needed. It will help you,” she insisted.

“You’ve got guts of titanium and brains of diamond, sister,” applauded Uyeda.

“Now, a bullet of steel will go in your brain if you don’t cooperate,” smiled V. His ship clashed into Uyeda’s.

“Hello, Uyeda Shoko, I’d like to get Pavitri and Serena back.”

“No way. Pavitri is MY slave.”

“Shut up, you know what I mean. And, it’s okay if Ashish is here, I never needed that good-for-nothing brat. Leave the copper, and capture the platinum, Sora.”

Sora, took out a gun, which shot some kind of semicircular metal band, clamping a heavy, gruesome metal stun collar with

retractable spikes violently across Pavitri's and Serena's neck.

"Come with me, vile beast," swore Sora. He dragged them into his mega yacht.

"If you try to do anything fishy, there is about a kilogram of C4 plastic explosives under the plane. And, I have a dead man's switch," declared V.

"Don't do anything, just stay there. I will show him. Negotiate with his demands," she chocked out in rapid Kutchi, a local language that no one else knew except for Ashish. She splashed water on Sora, who was laughing and fully drenched in the cold, salty water.

"I am telling you for the first and the last time, just to be fair, I will spare your life if you kowtow to me and beg for forgiveness."

"What an idiot!" he laughed, taking out a remote. He pressed the "electric shock"

button, forcing fifty thousand volts into Pavitri's and Serena's body.

CHAPTER 13

SAFETY AT WHAT COST

Pavatri turned towards V, her body sizzling like the Hindenburg, just waiting to blow up

“Now, you have to give up,” she said fiercely, just to be laughed at. He unsheathed a briquet sword. They lashed around, punching, and slicing air. He accidentally slashed at Pavatri’s collar, making Pavatri had him in a critical position, but she hesitated. She could either hit him to death, which would blow up the plane, or she could let her guard down. She chose the latter. V’s adamantine sabre gashed her left eye, but she still stood strong. She trapped his hand in a powerful hold, holding the explosive switch, and snatching out off his hand.

“Drop Potassium, Now!” Pavatri screamed. Serena feebly smashed one am-

pule near V's back. The water instantly reacted to the potassium, creating a blazing inferno, sparks flying left and right. He was red hot, both metaphorically and literally.

“YEAOWWWWWW,” he screamed like a thousand watt speaker on full volume. The worst part was that the potassium turned into potassium hydroxide, which is basically very similar to sodium hydroxide. He yelped and felped and screamed as he got creamed, as he was left to a fate akin to the Pakistanis.

“LETSGOOO!” They cheered, yet to Serena, the book was open.

“On the thin line between death and life, if the serum is taken, it will bestow powers over the universe,” she read. That was enough. She stabbed herself in the neck, and screamed.

“GIVE ME THE SERUM!”

“What in the name of god are you doing,” asked Ashish, force feeding her the serum. Slowly, her breath started becoming

faint, her heart not beating. They frantically checked her pulse, but she was no more. Tears streamed down their puffy eyes, seeing their lost companion, Serena's mouth filled with blood.

CHAPTER 14

REGRET

Although she didn't realise it, a new symbiote entered her body. Her veins contracted, as a branch of new ichor vessels penetrated through her body.

“Wow, let me try moving,” she thought. With that notion, she twitched her left arm, knocking the universe into another one. It was spectacular, as they both collided, releasing lethal amounts of gamma radiation, into a blazing fury of a leviathan blackhole. Realising the gravity of the situation (she was entering the event horizon of the black hole), she realised what she had done. Fear, woe and misery engulfed her just like the blackhole. She roared in extreme pain, and killed herself, destroying the universe in the process.

Now, if you come to think about it, maybe Pavitri's locket had something to do

with it, but the secret is buried in time, irreversible.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

He loves playing the guitar and the drums, coding and making electronics, and yo-yoing. Find more about him on his website- ishaant.com. He is about 12 years old when writing this story.

A SAGA

A simple military excursion turns into a game of death. With a Yakuza and French Mafia on the chase, can they handle it? Can they search what they've yearned for?