

Nisha

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*a spirited girl with black hair and dancing lotus blue eyes.
A girl who was named for the night...*

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1 - Chapter 1

The voices called her. They wanted her to come and join them. She refused the pleas. Yet the hands reached out to her, calling her name...

Lotus blue eyes shot open. Gasping for breath Nisha sat up. It was that dream again. The one she'd had many times. What could it mean? Perspiration beaded her forehead. A knock came at her door. "Miss? Your mother asked that I come wake you." She rolled her eyes, there was that same maid, she was always so nervous. Nisha reluctantly pulled herself out of the comfort of her warm blankets. "Tell her that I'm coming." She swung her feet around and put them on the ground. Quickly she pulled them back, for the floor was ice cold. "Chhaya? Do you know where my slippers are?" Chhaya scurried in with the blue slippers. "Sorry miss. I was just keeping them out of the way. You see they were kind of dirty so I was just washing-"

"Thank you, I do believe that's fine."

Head bobbing, Chhaya backed out of the room. Nisha sighed and dragged herself upright. She walked over to her mirror and sat down. Picking up her brush she started to brush her glossy black curls. She lined her eyes with kohl and colored the top of her eyelids a gold colored brown. Reluctant to finish getting ready, she waited a few moments before calling Chhaya into her room. Chhaya scurried in yet again. She picked up a hot iron and curled tendrils of hair around Nisha's face as to soften the strong angle of her face. Quickly, Nisha walked over to her wardrobe. From there she chose a red sari. Gold slippers, and finally she was ready. Nisha walked slowly down the stairs. She dreaded breakfast with her mother. Every time they talked seemed to lead to finding a good husband for her. Was that all her mother ever thought about? Her mother was leaning towards her cousin Ashtok. Nisha did not know what to think for she had never seen her cousin before and every time she asked about him her mother would scowl at her and ask if looks were so important. That's what got her scared. Was he ugly? It wasn't that she was vain...well not really. She just didn't want to have to marry a man who cares for naught but himself or someone who never worked a day in his life and was soft and had no muscle. Not that she ever worked a day in her life but she was not fat. Nisha was slim and graceful. She could be quiet, *sometimes* but she always knew what she wanted. You could say she was spoiled, but it never showed. Well not often unless you count bad moods. Normally when Chhaya would come to get her she would be in a bad mood because she loathed breakfast with her mother. It wasn't even that she hated her mother, but her mother wasn't one for much sense. She was rather over sweet and loved parties and gossip. Nisha never quite enjoyed all of that kind of silliness.

"Nisha darling!" her mother called. "Stop lingering on those stairs and come down here."

Slowly, very slowly Nisha made her way down the stairs. This was one of those days. "Yes maji." she called back. Barely had she sat down before her mother started talking. "Nisha, must you call me mother all the time? Can you not just say "yes"? Darling, don't roll your eyes it is very unbecoming. Well

now that I've said that, what would you like for breakfast? A mango? Some fruit? No just a mango...don't want you to become chubby. That's a dear. Well actually we'll just get you some grapes too perhaps? Chhaya!-" at this time she rang a small silver bell. Nashi groaned inwardly. She *hated* mangoes. She didn't mind grapes as much. Her mother did not notice her face, for when Chhaya hurried into the room her mother ordered exactly that. "Chhaya, a mango....and some grapes." After Chhaya left, her mother started talking again. "There's a party this evening. We're going of course. I think you should wear that absolutely precious blue and silver sari. The nice silver head piece too. Maybe a suitable man will be there." Nashi didn't answer for all of a sudden she felt rather sick. Her head pounded. She put a finger to her temple, her mothers words were slurring together. "Nashi? Darling? Are you okay? You look rather pale." Her mother peered at her. "My head hurts maji. That's all." Unfortunately that was not all for in the next moment Nashi collapsed out of her chair and into a heap on the floor. The last clear thought she had was: *I wonder if this has anything to do with my dream? But oh my head hurts....*

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2 - Chapter 2

Nisha was swimming in a deep dark pool. It was quiet and the water was silky on her skin, she never wanted to leave. Voices, like the ones in her dreams whispered across her mind. A real noise came close; she tried to swim further under the surface. Little good that did. She wished the sound went away. "Nisha?" The voice came floating through the water to her ears. "Nishaaa?"

Slowly her eyelids fluttered open. Her mother was kneeling on the floor next to her looking into her eyes. A damp cloth was on her forehead. She sat up lightly and looked around "What happened?" Her mother's brow was furrowed, "Darling, you *fainted*. Goodness gracious you gave me a fright." Nisha inwardly sighed. *Oh dear, a fright ! Whatever would happen now*, she thought sarcastically. "Maji-" Her mother gave her a pointed look. Nisha continued "I am fine. Really I am." Her mother looked at her skeptically but slightly hopefully. Nisha could see she was dying to go to the party. She grimaced to herself as she said "Um... We could go...to the party." With an ecstatic grin her mother threw her arms around her neck. "Oh that's just perfect. You will wear that blue and silver sari no?" Nisha sighed. If a person could die from sighing Nisha would be dead by now. Her mother was just like a gossiping girl. She was never serious and would never come off as a person to talk to for advice. Not like Nisha was very serious, with her eyes that sparkled when she was truly happy and her carefree spirit. "Ma-" another meaningful look from her mother "um... I'm going to go upstairs for some rest before the party?"

"Of course dear, go on. Make sure you wake up in time to prepare. Do you want me to send Chhaya up to wake you?"

"Oh no" Nisha hastily said, "I'll wake up on my own."

"Alright. I'll see you this evening before we leave."

Dragging her feet Nisha trudged up the stairs. In a second- "Nisha? Don't drag your feet darling, you'll ruin your slippers" Ever so daintily Nisha dramatically walked up the stairs. Once she got into her room she quickly slipped into a rather plain sari. It was a blue color; her mother bought her a million blue saris. Her lotus blue eyes were an amazing sight. They could show whirl winds of emotion at times. She didn't think the sari she picked out was a nice one, but it looked startling good on her. It flattered her slim willowy figure. She pried open her window and dropped lightly onto her toes on the ledge beneath. Tiptoeing along she knew from experience that she had to be careful. One wrong move and it would alert her mother to someone on the roof. Not like she'd really notice, too busy preparing for the party which she took forever to prepare for.

Once she was on the road she headed toward the market. Calmly she walked through the streets, looking at this and that. She gazed in awe at the many beautiful bangles that were for sale. The market

was a colorful place, a cheerful place. She got some food and fed some of the elephants standing off to the side. An old lady was selling flutes, magnificently carved with ornate designs on the worn wood. After admiring them for a while, Nisha bought one. She started to think about heading back home. Without looking and turning abruptly, she hurtled into someone. Stunned, she tripped and fell. "Oh! I am sorry miss." A hand was offered and Nisha took it. She looked up into warm gold eyes. "Are you okay?" Nodding, she shakily stood up. "My sincerest apologies. Sometimes I think that I have clumsiness of an elephant." The person chuckled. Nisha smiled. She looked at the person and saw that it was a young man. He looked to be two or three years older than her. A handsome profile and dark hair that seemed to sometimes be in the way of those dancing golden eyes. He was rather tall and- She blushed. Here she was staring at a boy she did not know. She looked to see the sun lowering down toward the horizon. The party! "I must go." She said quickly. "But-

"I am sorry but I am late."

"But you-" Nisha hurried off. The handsome young man bent and picked up the flute that Nisha had just bought. He looked toward the road where you could see her silhouette against the sinking sun.

3 - Chapter 3

Slipping back through her window, Nisha knew that she didn't have that much time to get ready. She bit her lip, *why did she always lose track of time?* Quickly she slipped into her *darling* blue sari and slipped the silver headpiece over her head. Surveying herself in the mirror she decided it would have to do. She changed her gold slippers to her silver ones and washed her face. Then, she brushed some new eye shadow on. Wincing, she pulled a brush through her tangled hair. Deciding that she'd have to go downstairs now rather than later she walked toward her door. Suddenly she found herself on the floor. "Oh dear. Sorry darling. I was just coming upstairs to make sure you were up. Did you know I hear the most curious noise before sounded like- oh I don't know...something on our roof-" Nisha rubbed the spot on her head where the door had banged into. Her mother continued "-but I think it was nothing." Nisha tried to look interested. "Really? That's odd. I didn't hear anything..."

Later that evening Nisha was getting irritated. Many men had come up to her asking her to dance, and as politely as she could she turned down all of them. She heard a chuckle and raised her eyes from the spot they were staring at on the floor. "Small world." Her eyes widened, the young man from the market! "You forgot something...at the market?... But you were in such a hurry...I didn't get a chance to return it to you."

"Excuse me?"

"Your flute?" He held out the instrument, and she took it.

Nisha flushed, she didn't even realize it was missing yet, she had been in such a hurry. "Oh! Thank you." He smiled at her and she returned the smile. "Would you care to dance?" He asked. She nodded. He took her hand and led her out to the dance floor. He put his arm on her waist and she felt her face flush. Luckily he didn't notice. They danced two dances in a row. Soon, they were slightly tired and decided to sit down.

"I'm afraid I didn't catch your name earlier. My name's Ash-" Another young man came to Nisha. "Will you dance with me?" She started to protest "Oh, no thank-" The young man paid little attention to her. He took her arm and led her out yet again to the dance floor. She looked over her shoulder helplessly at where the young man she met at the market sat. A quick flash of disappointment flashed in his eyes before he smiled his amiable smile. Her over-eager partner was off beat, narrowly missing stepping on her feet a few times in a row. Without realizing it she rolled her eyes and the sitting young man laughed. Horror crept its way up to her cheeks in a blush. She didn't think sometimes. Mentally she scolded herself.

After what seemed like forever, the dance was over. Relieved, she sank into a chair, rubbing her bruised feet. Glancing at where the mystery man had been she found he was gone. Frowning she decided she might as well go home before she was dragged into a dance again. Stepping gingerly out into the streets, she made her way home

On the way, Nisha felt the hair on the back of her neck stand up. She sensed someone watching her. Wishing she hadn't decided to walk alone, Nisha quickened her pace. The watcher did the same, you could hear them moving. Apparently they had decided that stealth was no longer necessary. *Stay calm*, she told herself. Hearing footsteps on the path behind her Nisha swallowed and turned. Positioned in a fighter's stance in the middle of the path, was a large burly man. "Wh-what...Wh-who are you?" He looked at her. "You are Nisha, no?" Hesitantly, she nodded, instantly regretting it. His eyes glittered with something Nisha couldn't place. "Then you have been having dreams?-" Nisha opened her mouth "-Don't even try to lie. Ah, I see it in your eyes; you have been having the dreams. You're coming with me." Terror gripped Nisha, but recovering from the initial shock she wisely did not show it. "You are taking me nowhere." She stated resolutely. "Oh?" The man lunged toward her. Fortunately, Nisha was a fast individual and dodged. Heart pounding, she came to the realization that this man was not joking and must be a very strange being indeed. How did he know about her dream; the one she had many times? He lunged again and yet again she dodged. Pretending to trip, she fell in the dusty road. With a triumphant smile the man bent down to look her in the face. "You-" He never got to finish. Flinging the dirt she had gathered in her hand in his face, Nisha swiftly got up and started running. The man cursed and wiped his watering eyes. By the time he could see, Nisha's willowy figure was running in the distance, getting farther and farther away with each passing second.

Panting, Nisha stopped only when she was in front of her house. Trying to fix her disheveled appearance, she brushed off the dirt that was on her sari and tried to fix her hair. Slowly, head held high, she walked into the house. Chhaya, started towards her, but Nisha held out a weary hand. "Please Chhaya, I'm tired, could you just send a drink up to my room." Concern in her eyes Chhaya asked "Miss? Are you sure you're-?" Nisha interrupted "Chhaya... drink?" Nodding, the once more jumpy Chhaya hurried off to the kitchen.

With a sigh, Nisha wearily dragged herself upstairs. Flopping onto her bed, she was left little time to ponder over the strange man before sleep claimed her. She did not notice the glass of water left for her on her bedside table. Nor did she notice the apprehensive look the skittish maid Chhaya gave her while she was sleeping.

4 - Chapter 4

Nisha sat up with a groan. She rubbed her eyes and stretched out her legs. Pain shot through her muscles and she quickly curled into a ball. *Why do my legs hurt?* She wondered. Then it all came back to her. Last night, that man, that unusual man, he knew her....but how? Then her mind floated back to the dance and she smiled when she thought of dancing with that man, whom she still did not know the name of. He had said before being interrupted that his name was Ash but didn't get to finish. A shocking realization hit her. What if his name was Ashok? Well maybe it was, another part of her mind reasoned, there were many people named Ashok. There was no guarantee that he was her cousin. She pictured his face, with his warm gold eyes, his dark hair, and his friendly smile-... what was she thinking? Here she was fantasizing about someone she had barely just met. She didn't even know his name.

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts. Chhaya was peering around the door. "Miss? You are feeling better I hope?" Nisha realized that Chhaya was concerned for her. She flashed Chhaya her warmest smile and nodded. Chhaya let out a sigh of relief. "Miss I haven't told your mother, about last night." She shot her a grateful look "Thank you." Nisha's mother was out for the day. Another shopping spree most likely, Nisha grimaced. Since she had the time she might as well go out again. "I will be going out again Chhaya. When will my mother be home?"

"Later this evening miss."

"Good. Then I will be going."

"Please be careful miss..." Chhaya had anxiety written all over her features.

Laughing, Nisha took in a deep breath. Smells from the market wafted toward her nose. For a reason Nisha could not identify, she loved the market. Feeling like a small child again she held out her arms and spun around. "Well, well, well" A pleasant voice interrupted her enjoyment. Startled she turned around, eyes wide. It was the young man. "Gracious. Don't sneak up on a person like that." The man chuckled. "Sorry." He did not look at all sorry. "Are you always at the market?" She nodded. "You have amazing blue eyes. Like the blue lotus." She flushed. "I'm afraid I never managed to say my name. It's Ashok." Her heart beat faster. But it couldn't be, her cousin was off on a trip. That relieved her but at the same time she was rather disappointed. "Nisha." He smiled and offered his arm. "Would you care to join me walking around?" After taking his arm, they started walking. Soon they were talking as if they had known each other forever.

"You mean to tell me you've never had Burfi?" His eyes danced. "Well we must change that." He

strode up to the vendor and bought two squares of the delicious dessert. One he ate himself but the other he offered to Nisha. She shook her head "I couldn't." Yet again he offered it. "Please?" With a smile threatening to show at the corners of her mouth she finally relented. She ate the Burfi and found that she liked it. "You have something on your face." She haphazardly wiped her face with the back of her hand. Ashok grinned. "Missed it." With his thumb he wiped along the bottom of her lip. Nisha flushed and Ashok hastily pulled his hand away aware of the boldness of what he was doing "Sorry." He swallowed and changed the topic. "How was it?" Nisha smiled broadly. "Good." All of a sudden she noticed it getting darker. "I have to go."

"What is this? Do you disappear when the sun does?" She looked up quickly and realized he wasn't angry but teasing. She turned to go. "Wait." Hastily she turned, question in her lotus blue eyes. "Will we meet again? Can you come tomorrow too?"

"What if I *can't*?"

"Then you won't get your surprise."

"A surprise? Then I will see you tomorrow, anything for a surprise." Laughing she turned yet again to go.

She crawled in her window just in time. Her mother came bursting in. "Hello darling. Good day? I had a great day. Shopping is so relaxing. I got some new clothes for you. Would you like to see them? Of course you would. And I know you already have a lot of saris but I just had to get these." She lay out sari after sari. Some emeralds, crimsons, gingers, at least one golden surprisingly no blues. A breath escaped her as her mother lay out the final one. "And this one isn't much but I decided you *might* like it." Awestruck Nisha looked at the sari. Not much? It was blue and silver but not like the last one she'd had. The other one had been rather plain. But this one had dazzling designs on it and instead of the silver looking more like grey, this silver shone. The blue itself had a silvery sheen to it. "This sari...you consider it to be 'not much'?"

Her mother beamed at her "You like it? Oh good. Not that it's quite my taste I find that I don't look half as good in blue as you do dear."

The next day, Nisha's mother went out again, this time to a party. So naturally Nisha went to the market. She strolled through the market place looking at this and that. "Starting without me?" With a start she turned around "Must you always sneak up on me?"

"Is that really a question that I must answer?"

A smile curved her full lips. "I suppose not."

"Well aren't you going to ask about your surprise? I'd have thought you would be dying to know, I'm hurt."

Nisha laughed Throwing herself on her knees she tilted her face upward. "Please oh please oh please?"

Ashok removed the basket from his arm in which he had been carrying something. Nisha opened the lid and let out a gasp of surprise. "A kitten?! Oh, she is so adorable. I shall name her Alpa because she is so little" Ashok laughed "But Nisha it's a boy."

"Oh. Well then I shall name him Alpesh because he is so tiny." She held up the small white kitten. Then she caught sight of its eyes. "They're blue!"

"Nearly all kittens have blue eyes when they're little."

"But his are different..."

"Well, surprisingly, he should have grown out of them two days ago, that's when all the others did. But maybe Alpesh will have blue eyes naturally. They are so like your own."

They walked through the market place yet another day. They made a pleasing sight, Ashok, and Nisha with a small white kitten perched on her arm.

5 - Chapter 5

A smile flitted across Nisha's face as she watched Alpesh pounce on a beam of light streaming through her window. Chhaya came into her room and yelped. "M-Miss there is an extremely large rat in your room!"

"Relax Chhaya it's a kitten."

"A kitten, miss?" The question was doubtful. "That isn't a kitten miss. It's small to be a kitten so it must be a big rat." Chuckling, Nisha calmed the astonished Chhaya. "I know. His name is Alpesh."

"Well it suits him miss. He *is* tiny. What will your mother say?"

"Alpesh is cute. Anything that is cute my mother adores." She paused. "Well unless of course she thinks it's a rat like you just did. She will be home later won't she?"

"She did say she'd be back home late." Chhaya watched the kitten for a while. "He is cute." She had a wistful expression. "Isn't he? Didn't you have a kitten when you were younger?" Shaking her head Chhaya replied "My mum was allergic to cats miss." Nisha softened "Play with him all you like."

"Sorry miss, I would love to but the chores won't do them themselves maybe another time." She started to leave. "Oh! Could you watch Alpesh when I um..." A smile tugged at the corners of Chhaya's mouth. "When you go out. Of course miss." Seconds later she left. Just in time too, for Nisha's mother came in just a few minutes later. "EEEEEE! A rat!" Sighing, Nisha shook her head. Not this again. "Maji it's a kitten. It was sitting on our doorstep and I heard it crying this afternoon so I went out and got it." Such a lie. So far Alpesh had never even uttered a noise. "What about disease darling. That kitten could carry disease."

"It doesn't. It looks perfectly healthy to you doesn't it? And anyway I have named him Alpesh. May I keep him Maji, please?" Her mother was giving in. "Well..." At that moment Alpesh decided to come over and rub against her legs purring. "Oh he is a *sweetheart*. Yes, yes you may keep him." With a flourish she swept out of the room. Hugging the kitten to her chest Nisha sat on her bed, thinking about Ashok. Little did she know, Ashok was doing the same at that very instance.

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That girl, Nisha with those beautiful azure eyes. Like the blue lotus. When he startled her she spun

around alarmed. What had caused her to be on the alert like that? A girl like that couldn't have anyone after her, could she? Then the way her face softened when she saw the kitten. And when she first had Burfi. Her dancing eyes filled his mind. Her golden skin and her long wavy black hair....

..*.*.*.*.*.*.*.*

Watching Alpesh munch his dinner, a glowing smile spread across Nisha's face. He was cute. Upon finishing his meal, he crawled over to her and dropped into her lap. Absently she started petting him and he started purring, his blue eyes closed in contentment. A red collar encircled his small neck. On it was a tiny bell so Nisha would know where he was. Looking down, she realized he had fallen asleep. Depositing him softly on the bed as to not wake him she slipped out her window.

Sneaking up the road she walked till she came to a clearing she knew well. She hadn't been there in quite a while. A sound behind her caused her to whirl around. There was a rustling in the bushes and whatever it was emerged. Alpesh! Quickly she ran over to him. "Alpesh you naughty kitty." She cooed to him. Yet another noise behind her caused her to turn and what she saw chilled her blood.

Sinking lower into the underbrush Nisha saw a man but it wasn't a man. With unseeing eyes, ravaged, contorted hands and hair that was too much to be on an ordinary person the thing sniffed the air with its nose. "*Nishaaa. Where areeee you.*" It hissed "*We are looking for you my dearr. We want you. And what we want we almosst alwayssss get. Sssee, we need your help. Ssomething that we need from you. You have been having dreamsss my preciouss. Come out, come out.*" With a final snuffle the thing left the clearing. She shivered and held Alpesh close, thinking how close she came to having an encounter with the creature. Silently she sat there stunned. The night sky stars glittered. "Thank you." She murmured into the soft white fur. "Thank you." As if in reply the kitten turned and licked her face. That brought Nisha slightly out of shock to think relatively clearly. Stumbling, she stood up and headed home, Alpesh clasped in her hands.

6 - Chapter 6

In the market Nisha glanced anxiously around. In the back of her mind she kept seeing the creature's face and hearing its voice echo through her head. She shivered and shook it from her mind. A touch to her arm caused her to jump. Ashok smiled at her and held up his hands. "No thief or pickpocket. Just me." She smiled at him her tense muscles relaxing. All of a sudden restlessness filled her mind as she felt someone watching her. She turned around to find a shadow disappearing into a tent. Telling herself that it was nothing but her overactive imagination she kept walking with Ashok. Soon she felt completely at ease and forgot all about the strange shadow.

Without warning, she was dragged into a small alley. With eyes large with fright she looked up at Ashok, whose face was clouded with unease. "Someone's following us" he murmured against her neck. She shivered. A shadow filled the entrance off the alley. "*We're looking for you dear. We have been and you will come with us this time*" The sinister being slithered closer. Ashok's brow furrowed as he saw Nisha's panic-stricken expression. "You are taking her no where."

"You are in no position to deny usss sweet. She comesss with me."

"I advise you to come no closer."

"What use iss she ssweet? You don't need her. Hand her over to uss." The voice was sing-song as the being edged closer. There was a soft noise behind the being and it paused and looked over its 'shoulder' if you could call it a shoulder. Presented with opportunity Ashok grabbed Nisha's hand and sprinted past the being into the open market yet again.

Yet, their troubles weren't over so easily. The large burly man from before grabbed her other wrist. "Wait just a moment." He leered at her. With a pang of disappointment she saw his eyes were fine. Not that she thought the dirt would have done anything. "Let-go-of-me." She muttered between gritted teeth. "Ah, ah, ah, don't you have an apology for me little miss?" He tightened the grip on her arm. "Still not letting go." She reminded him. "Apology?"

"Never."

"Then face the consequences." He pulled her to him. Struggling, she found she couldn't break free. "You're a pretty lass. Too pretty hmm?" All of a sudden she found herself on the ground. "She -said- let go." Ashok, eyes blazing, glared at the man. The man was staggering from the blow. With a swift kick the man lay slumped on the ground. "Come on." She didn't move, shocked. He picked her up in his

arms, and headed toward the end of the market.

“Thank you.” Nisha lowered her eyes and turned to go. A hand grabbed her wrist. “Not leaving just yet.” Sighing, she turned. “I suppose you want me to explain.”

“It would help, seeing as two-” he paused looking for the word, “-things, just came after you.”

“It’s a long story.”

“I have time.” He sat down in the shade of a tree and stretched out his legs. Nisha found herself pouring out her story. She found Ashok indignant when he heard about how the man had come after her before. “That..that...” He was too angry to form words, “came after you before?! You shouldn’t walk home by yourself.”

“I’ll be fine.” This is exactly what Nisha didn’t want to happen.

“No, you won’t. I’m bringing you home. Whether I have to carry you the whole way.”

Remembering his strong arms from earlier, Nisha flushed. “No.”

“Yes.”

She grinned “Sorry to do this...but-” she darted away. She heard him chasing her. Then all of a sudden it was quiet. Was he gone? With a roar, he plunged out of the underbrush and scooped her up into his arms. “See? You need me?” He smiled sweetly.

At dusk, you would see him walking down the road toward her house. She was still in his arms, asleep. Kissing the top of her head, he was worried. What were these beings going to try next? Her eyelids fluttered open and she recognized where they were. “Could you put me down here?”

“What you don’t like me carrying you?”

She smiled. “I love you carrying me, but my mother would have a fit seeing you carrying me home. She’d probably think I hurt myself.”

“Awww, so I *have* to put you down?”

“Yes”

With a sigh, he set her down. “Fine.”

“Thank you again.” She started toward her house. Abruptly, she found herself spun around and in a warm embrace. “Not a problem.”

“Ashok...I have to go home.”

“I know, but can I meet you tomorrow?”

“Hmmm....”Nisha saw his face and then tilted her head back and laughed. “Of course.” Ashok seized his chance. Her laugh cut short, she found his lips against hers. At first she was surprised and didn't react, and then she relaxed and kissed him back deeply. Mischievously, she pulled away. “Have to get home.” He chuckled. “ Tease.” She smiled and blew a kiss. Then she hurried toward her house.

Her mother opened the door. “Nisha, darling. Tomorrow you have to go to a party with me.” That was when she was going to see Ashok. “Ah- Maji?”

Pointed glance at the maji. “Yes darling?”

“Must I go?”

“Yes darling you must.” Her mother looked excited. “Oh! I can't stand it! Darling I have decided on a suitable husband!”

Nisha felt as though her world was tumbling down around her. “No!”

“Nisha?” Her mother was startled. “Are you okay sweetheart?” Nisha's eyes pooled with tears, she ran upstairs and hurled herself on her bed.