



Arranged/Love: Two stories of Indian Science Fiction
Dinesh Rao

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Chapter 1

Arranged Marriage

With the words-I now tag you married- the screen behind the priest came alive with a swirl. The couple turned to look at the screen and they saw the word [married] in the center, glowing softly in blue. Words started appearing around it, all the people in the temple had started their tagging. For the first time in a long time, Raj and Amrita saw their tagsets live. It was oddly hypnotic, and both of them tried to memorize what they saw, but it had been quite a large wedding even for Indian standards, and there were too many tags to register. The screen helpfully increased the font size of repeated tags, but the [married] tag still stood prominent, lording it over [sweet], [happy] and hundreds of similar adjectives. Amrita later swore that she even saw a couple of [finally]s but no one would own up to it. Seeing the tagsets was one of the best parts of getting married, she said, you finally finally know what other people thought of the wedding.

The priest let them all watch for a while, he knew that in a few minutes the tag screen would stabilize and there would be no more new words to see, and anyway, he had to switch off the screen before somebody started gaming the system just to see their preferred word in glowing blue. Besides, there was the rest of the ceremony to go through. Everybody was secretly waiting for the tag match results to come through- it was widely thought that the match alone could make or break the marriage. The ceremony went by in a blur for Amrita, and Raj was fidgety as well. At a quarter past ten, it ended, and the priest turned once more to the tag screen. I hereby present to you the tag match, he said, and pressed a button on the silvery remote in his hand. The tag screen swirled once more, but it displayed just a single number- 98. There was a gasp from the audience, and with reason, this was the highest tag match score that anyone had ever seen. Even the priest looked a bit startled, he'd never seen it go higher than 82. And even that

score was the wedding from a highly insular family. He recovered his poise and congratulated the bride and groom once more and signaled the end of the ceremony.

Meanwhile, all of Amrita's and Raj's friends and family gathered around them offering their congratulations. Amrita was beaming, trying hard to remain calm and not go all giddy, but she did a poor job of it. Her happiness showed in every step she took, her ghagra fluttered around her, and she couldn't stop bursting into a wide smile every now and then. All her latent doubts about the wedding vanished in an instant. Raj looked similarly relieved and quietly triumphant, with every reason to as well, such an awesome tag match was one to be bragged and celebrated. The party had truly begun.

Three months later, Raj's and Amrita had settled down into a routine. A pleasant routine, but a routine nevertheless. Raj found it weird in the beginning- to work when somebody else was around. In deference to Amrita's rather strict upbringing, they'd decided not to live together till the wedding was over. Amrita was sure that this gesture had contributed a lot to the tag score, and she was happy with her decision. Raj was a typical run of the mill 30 year old computer programmer, and with the ubiquitous net, he didn't need to be in an office, and preferred to work from home. At first, Amrita found it unsettling as well- Raj would zone out on some coding spree, and become completely oblivious to everything around him. Sometimes Amrita would return early from her Ad agency and find him spaced out in front of the screen, completely ignoring her arrival, her comments about her day, everything. Over time, Raj started working earlier, trying to finish his session before Amrita got home, sometimes even getting up in the middle of the night to finish off a quick troubleshoot session.

Sometimes they'd have friends over and in the first few months somehow all everybody could talk about was the high tag score. Amrita loved to relive the moment, and Raj took part in the conversation gamely but he never seemed to quite get over the fact that their wedding had been arranged. After years of mistimed affairs and disastrous flirtations, after years of cynically eyeing potential mates in all sorts of bars, he'd finally succumbed and agreed to sign up to an arranged marriage service. If it had been any regular old typical Indian arranged marriage service, he would have balked- but this one was different. They claimed to match

tags for their perfect fit. He had been suspicious- nobody was supposed to have access to the full tagset, but the Tag Marriage service claimed that they had acquired access not only to the publicly available tags but also the private ones and with the help of really smart matching algorithms they were able to boast of an incredible success rate. Raj knew that it was not a trivial problem-it was not simply a matter of matching words. People tended to tag with all their senses. In fact tags were more likely to be images and feelings rather than words. Ever since the memory implant was invented people had gone recording crazy- recording everything and anything. Nobody used diaries and cameras anymore- why bother when all your memories and impressions could be recorded and accessed whenever you wanted. Everything could be stored online, or at a private datastore or even on a small recording device that you could carry around. Then people started putting their memories for viewing by others, and that's when tagging really took out. It was simply too hard to organize all this mass of amorphous data. Online search engines quickly expanded to deal with this new data but it was only after tagging became a semi automatic reflex did the task become easier. Tagging changed everything. If you went for a job interview, they checked your tags. If you auditioned for a movie role, they checked your tags. Not only the tags that you'd made, but also tags that other people made of you. Tags had changed everything; it had certainly changed Raj's life.

Amrita never knew how much the question of an arranged marriage vexed Raj- she was more used to the idea. She'd flown back to India many times to attend weddings and almost all of them were arranged. One of them was even done the old fashioned way- with horoscopes and priests deciding how appropriate the match was. And with the proliferation of tags all around the world, it seemed natural that the Indian community had adopted this most modern of methods as a convenient extension of their traditional methods. The tag matching service turned out to be so successful that 90 percent of modern Indian marriages were now arranged this way. Raj on the other hand had only a passing familiarity with the system. He knew that his parents had an arranged marriage, but had never paid it any heed. Amrita, on the other hand, was accustomed to all sorts of matchmaking services. Her parents had signed up for the Tag Marriage service quite early on, but they never found a man that suited them or Amrita. They were quite eager to see their daughter settled but not willing to saddle her with a lesser than optimal tag match.

Amrita was beautiful; she had long black hair and was given to wearing bright, colourful clothes, with the result that she turned heads wherever she went. She had the inapproachable look down pat, and she could give the brush off like a pro. People always stared at her on the street, and she'd trained herself to ignore them. She felt much safer online, where she could block at will, or even fail to respond. It was all so much easier online. No painful remonstrances to deal with. But as all her friends started settling down into marriage and having children, her own insecurity had increased. She was never sure whether the guys she went out with were really truly attracted to her because of what she was or because of how she looked. She became more and more amenable to the idea of checking out a potential match online, where her looks didn't matter all that much. So when she got yet another email from her mother telling her about this new Tag Matching service, she consented without even thinking about it. It was only a fraction of her salary anyway. So when she got an email from them stating that they'd found a guy with a very high match probability, she was more than intrigued.

They'd hit it off from the start, and the chemistry was undeniable. For the first time in a long time, Amrita felt relaxed in a guy's presence. She loved to recount to her friends how deftly Raj had woven the conversation and how it was uncanny the level of connection they had. It made some sort of sense, after all, tagging was the most comprehensive way to know a person. It went much beyond 'enjoy walks on the beach' and 'listen to acid jazz'. A good tag match ensured, almost by default as it were, that they'd had similar tastes and responses to almost anything. With Raj there was no fear of irreconcilable differences- she knew that they would even look at the sunset in the same way. Amrita knew that this relationship was going to end well, a feeling that she tried hard to fight against, but in the end, when Raj proposed, it was impossible to say no.

Two years after the wedding, things had changed...so gradually that she hardly noticed it change. Raj was spending more and more time at the computer. He explained that he'd gotten a major project from one of the search engines, and it was time sensitive, and that he absolutely had to finish it by a certain time. It was a huge order, and he was very lucky to get it. The problem was tagging had reached critical mass, and there was too much data flowing in. The central regulating authority was still maintaining public and private stores, but the AD industry was trying to

leverage it to suit their needs. Even Amrita's own company had an elite research team working on how to utilize tags. Any new technique that would help them harness the tags would benefit them enormously.

Amrita was vaguely tolerant of Raj's new schedule; she too knew how things got when there was a major order to finish. However, after a couple of weeks of never exchanging more than a few words with Raj, she grew irritable. One day she returned from work to find an empty house. Raj had gone out for something and hadn't left a note to say where he'd gone. She debated pinging him on the cellphone, but decided not to. She poured herself a drink and sat in front of the TV, but soon lost interest in the programs. No matter how much society had changed in the last few years, entertainment was still a hit and miss affair. She was restless. Music? No. Memory cruising? No. A movie? Maybe. There was a new Nouveau Bollywood release, wasn't there? She switched on the TV and connected to the torrent site. The damn producers had released them in yet another weird format. She'd have to download the program to convert it to a regular one. She got up, finished her drink and started to get her notepad out when she noticed that Raj's system was still on. She went to his machine, minimized all the windows and opened a new browser. Within minutes, she'd downloaded the movie, the format changing software and converted the movie into something that her TV could handle. Only one more step to go, and she emailed the movie to her TV. She restored the windows, and was about to leave the chair when she noticed that one of the open windows was a browser pointed at a sub site of her company. Huh, that's odd, Amrita thought, why would Raj be looking at a page at her company's site? She looked more closely. It wasn't a public page- she knew that it was password protected. At least it was supposed to be password protected. Maybe there was a security breach. She'd have to ask Raj when he came back. She put it from her mind and went back to the TV and began viewing the movie.

Several days later Raj had accomplished a breakthrough in his coding and could afford to take some time off. Happy to seem him in this mood, Amrita suggested that they take the afternoon off and go to a movie-house, and Raj agreed. It was almost like old times. The movie was a comedy, but it was also one of those hybrid bollywood movies that were all the rage these days. Half way through the film, Amrita looked at Raj, and saw that he was hardly laughing. The movie was quite funny, but Raj was serious. Not even a smile. Amrita grew disquiet. With a tag

match of 98, it was almost a given that they would find the same things funny. It wasn't as if Raj was stressed, he had been carefree and light during their walk to the moviehouse. It was odd. And on the way back, Amrita remembered the computer and how Raj had been at an internal company site. She asked him about it, trying to be as casual as she could. Raj laughed. Yeah, the work I've been doing is being subcontracted to me. I was curious as to who the original contractors were and so I tracked it back. It turned out to be your company. At first I was surprised, but then I realized that Ad agencies have a lot of interest in tags these days. Then it made sense.

Amrita said, oh but that page was password protected.

Ah come on, there's no protection that cannot be circumvented, you know. Besides I was just curious, I was just looking. Don't worry about it.

Amrita was mollified somewhat, but something else struck her. Oh so you work with tag coding? I thought you were more into interface design or something.

Yeah it's a new thing that came my way, so I decided to take it up. You know, new challenge, more fun. Raj spoke lightly, but he couldn't hide the slight quaver in his voice. Amrita immediately tagged this moment with [fishy], [odd], [followup] and a host of other feeling tags. They walked back to their apartment in silence, but both were tagging furiously.

That day marked a shift in their relations. Raj became more attentive to her needs, but he couldn't stop her from getting more and more restless. She picked up cues all the time; she even had a secret tag folder especially for these feelings. Raj buying a new CD, Raj saying one day that he liked a certain song, a song that she hated, all these oddities started accumulating. Once she started paying attention to these things, they seemed to be everywhere. Meanwhile, the breakthrough that Raj had been counting on apparently fell short of the client's expectations and he was pulled back to the grind. He discussed his work with Amrita from time to time, but he was always vague when it came to her AD company. They had more and more frequent discussions about tagging and especially with respect to the AD industry. It all came to a head one day, when Amrita surprised Raj at the computer. It was the middle of the night and she'd gotten up to get a drink of water, when she noticed that Raj wasn't in bed, instead, he was in his customary pose- hunched in front of the

monitor. She walked up to him to see what he was up to. Raj was busy typing something into a command window, but it only partly obscured a browser window. Her heart started beating faster as she read the top line- it said Amrita Singh. And in a smaller font, Global Tagset. She inhaled sharply, and Raj spun out of his typing reverie. He saw Amrita standing there, and his hand instinctively closed all windows with a single mouse gesture. He turned to her, but the look on her face said it all. She knew, she was smart, she'd already put two and two together. Suddenly all those tags made sense, and even in her confusion, one tag stood out in her mind- [hacker]. But of what? What was he hacking into? But I'm not a hacker, Raj said, and Amrita thought she'd spoken aloud, but she hadn't. The tag [hacker] had appeared in yet another console window. Now she knew. He was hacking into her tagset. She didn't know how it was even possible to do that, but apparently he'd managed to do that. Abruptly she turned away from him and went back to the bed. She heard the scuffle of the chair as Raj stood up and switched off the computer. She heard his footsteps coming closer and closer. Raj stopped at the door and said, -Amrita. I can explain everything.

Raj was smitten with Amrita long before they even met. After the culmination of a string of misadventures, he'd decided to use his specialized skills in coding to solve this problem as well. He had briefly met Amrita once before, at a party, but when he'd asked about her, he'd found out that Amrita came from a strict cultural background, and there was no way of getting close to her. At least, not for some one like him. There was no way her parents would even consent to a match with him, not with the thousands of negative tags that he'd accumulated over the past. They were small trivial things to his mind, but taken together they presented an entirely different story. He'd made so little an impression that Amrita hadn't even recorded a tag of him. He knew that, because Raj did a bit of tag hacking on the side. He was one of the few people who had the skills to break into the heavily encrypted tagset store and his work was often in demand, especially by shadowy front organizations. It was usually ad agencies these days, and they were generally looking for trends anyway. Breaking into a single individual's tagset was an immensely challenging task. But Raj had managed that. He broke into both Amrita's as well as his own tagset and altered enough to ensure that there would be a high match. And then all he had to do was wait till the matching algorithm picked him from the hordes of other potential mates.

Amrita was stunned to hear all this. I thought we were a perfect match, she said. But we are, said Raj. We are. It's just that everybody looks for other ways to characterize what a person is and nobody looks at the person anymore. If we had met in the normal course of life, you would never have given me a second look. You actually did meet me, but you don't even remember that, do you?

I don't think I met you.

Well, you did. But it doesn't matter now. What matters is that I only did this because I believed that tags didn't matter. I had to beat the system for my one chance of happiness. Tags are irrelevant, Amrita, even without them we can still be a perfect couple. Nothing matters except who we are. And we don't need an external system to tell us who we are. I don't know who you are, said Amrita, everything has been a lie. Everything. And tags do matter- if they didn't match, how could we have a happy life? It would be doomed from the start.

She choked back a sob and looked at Raj. Almost calmly, she asked him, What was the actual tag match score?

He looked away.

She asked him again, and he spoke the number softly. 34.

Amrita turned her face away from him. In that single gesture, Raj saw that they had no future together, and that there was no escaping the tags.

[END]

Chapter 2

The Mask

‘Nobody expects you to cook, you know,...’ said Anil. ‘It’s not like anything will change. My parents will still accept you as their daughter-in-law, and besides, you saw how they treated you at our wedding. They completely adored you. I don’t know why you’re so nervous about the visit.’

Indeed, Adriana didn’t know why she was so nervous. The wedding had been almost a year ago and even though there’d been no glitches or drama, especially with the language problem, she hadn’t quite shaken the feeling that her in-laws would have preferred Anil to get married to a nice South Indian girl, or even better, a Kannadiga. To be sure, they’d treated her well and never once expressed any hint of dissatisfaction, but she felt that they were just playing nice for Anil’s sake. Anil interrupted her thoughts-

‘Besides, you can barely make toast without burning it. How on earth are you going to make a traditional Kannadiga meal? Once again, I suggest you relax and let me do the cooking. I’ve been at it for much longer than you have and I assure you nothing will happen. Not even one eyebrow will be raised.’

Adriana wouldn’t let Anil dissuade her. She had the internet to depend on, in fact it was on a community weblog for international couples that she first hit upon the idea of preparing a meal for her in-laws. But it was not going to be easy... in fact it was going to be near impossible.

Anil did his best to help her plan the feast. He made the long trip to Parramatta to pick out all the ingredients she needed. The next weekend, Adriana stood in front of the stove with a recipe book, determined to get it right. She followed the instruction carefully, paying attention to each ingredient and measuring everything to the nearest milligram. Occasionally, she ran out to the garden where Anil was busy repotting some plants, tapped him on the shoulder, waited for him to disconnect the

Garden Mask, and then asked him for clarification on some procedure before racing back to the kitchen. After a few dozen of these interruptions, Anil finally switched off the Mask, waited for his brain to go back to normal and headed back into the house. He paused near the kitchen, and said petulantly, 'It's not fun to keep switching the Garden Mask on and off, y'know...' but Adriana was deep in concentration, stirring the pot as if her life depended on it. She just muttered a hmmm in his general direction. Anil went to take off his shoes just as Adriana let out a wail. 'It's ruiinedddd', she cried, and Anil rushed to the kitchen. Somehow in the space of a few seconds, the Bisibele Bath had charred and was threatening to catch fire. Anil helped her take the heavy pot off the stove. That stopped it smoking but it did nothing for Adriana's mood. She threw down her apron, and left the kitchen. Anil followed her to the sofa where she was sitting in a forlorn heap, and hugged her. She sobbed, 'I'll never be able to do this. I don't know what to do anymore...'

After a while she calmed down, and looked at Anil. Anil just pointed out again that she was creating a fuss over nothing, but Adriana wasn't convinced. Having grown up pretty much alone in her native Colombia, drifting from hostel to hotel before finding a job in Sydney, she keenly felt the need for a family. Her own sister barely spoke to her and her mother, when she'd been alive had never made a secret of the fact that she'd disliked Adriana's penchant to travel overseas instead of staying in Bogota. Now that she'd finally settled down with Anil, she was anxious to be as perfect a part of his family as she could possibly be. She still wanted to show her in-laws how much it meant to her to be accepted, and she only wished that she'd learnt to cook somewhere along the way.

'Programming software is so much easier - you run the program, if doesn't work, you debug and before you know it, it's working. Cooking-not so much, once you screw it up, it's all over, and you have to start from scratch.'

'Look,' said Anil, 'It's not possible to learn to cook overnight. Forget about it...'

'Yes,' she accepted, 'It's not possible ...' She stopped speaking, struck by an idea.. 'Unless,...I cook with a Mask!'

Anil laughed. 'Sure, like you're going to get a Mask encoded with Kanadiga cooking techniques. It's hard enough to get a good recipe book.'

'No, but there are Indian Cook Masks, aren't there?'

'I think so, but you know, India is a rather large country and the cuisine differs from town to town, let alone across the country.'

'Yes, yes,' She said impatiently, 'But I can hack the Mask. I'm sure I can. There's no software that I cannot find a way to modify.'

To mollify her, Anil decided to buy her an Indian Cook Mask. He didn't think it would work, but at least it would keep Adriana in a better mood. She always found herself calming down after a coding session at the computer.

Modifying the Mask would not be easy. For one, Adriana was not familiar with the neural wiring in the Mask. She couldn't mess with the wires without causing some damage. The breakthrough came when she realized that since all the newer Masks came with an update option, she could hook it up to a computer and in this way change the software encoded in the features of the Mask.

Using knowledge enhancing Masks was still a relatively new thing, but it was gaining ground all the time. Once people got used to wearing them, or seeing other people wearing them, the Masks became really popular. Why spend hours poring over gardening or fix-it-yourself books when you could simply wear a Mask for a while and tap into its database and do the task as if you knew how to do it? The shape of the Mask was necessary because it recreated the encoded knowledge in all the senses, and this way the sensory input was complete. Thus when Anil wanted to do some gardening, he simply put on his Garden Mask and then he would know precisely how to repot, or aerate the lawn or even how to tell the health of a plant from the smell of its leaves. The Masks had proved to be so popular that they were changing the face of human society much like cellphones had many years before.

It was many nights of hard work before Adriana was able to update the Indian Cook Mask to accommodate Kannadiga recipes and after a quick test with Anil's help, the Mask was good to go.

The first weekend after Anil's parents landed in Sydney, Adriana was restless, moving in and out of the kitchen distractedly. She didn't want to cook with her in-laws in the house, so she asked Anil to take them to look around the city. As soon as they left, she put on the Mask and started her preparations to cook. It was a revelation; suddenly she knew what to do. She knew how long to sauté the onions, she knew how to do the seasoning, she knew all the tricks that would have taken her a lifetime of cooking to accumulate. Soon the kitchen was overflowing with the aroma of a myriad spices and this in turn was relayed to Adriana's brain by the Mask. Just before the in-laws returned, she was all ready and she switched off the Mask. She'd made sure to taste everything while wearing the Mask and she was certain that the cooking had gone

according to plan.

When Anil entered the house, he immediately noticed that the house was filled with the smells that he invariably associated with his childhood in India. His mother also noticed it, and headed straight to the kitchen, where Adriana was transferring the food into various serving pots and pans.

Anil's mother said, 'Oh look at this. You've made Bisibele bath! And Raitha, and Curd Rice. It's amazing! I didn't even know you could get Sandige here! It must have taken you hours. You didn't have to do all this, but I am glad you did. It looks very good, and right in time too, because -I don't know about you all,- but I'm starving.'

Adriana just smiled gratefully in her direction.

Anil's parents were staying only for two weeks and they spent most of their time traveling around Sydney, doing all the usual touristy stuff. They also caught up with their friends and relatives and invariably mentioned how good their new daughter-in-law was at cooking Kannadiga food. Consequently, news of Adriana's cooking skills spread like bushfire through the Indian community. Word of this eventually got back to Anil, but he chose to keep it to himself. He knew that it would only spoil Adriana's mood. But he couldn't stop the Kannadiga community from inviting Adriana to cook for the Krishna festival.

Among the few festivals that were celebrated in full strength by the Kannadiga community, the Krishna festival was one of the biggest. This festival had special meaning for Anil and his family, since Krishna was also their House God. The Kannadiga community had been organizing these meetings for years and this time they were holding it at one of Anil's distant cousin's house. All the women were expected to go early and join in a community cook-a-thon for the festival feast. When Adriana got to know about it, she was horrified. There was no way she could join group cooking extravaganza wearing a Mask, and if she did go without the Mask, everyone would immediately know that she couldn't cook. She couldn't even come clean on her 'cooking prowess' since that would jeopardize her role in the family. All the old tension immediately came back, and the strain of thinking about it re-ignited her insomnia.

The day of the festival loomed darkly and Adriana was close to tears every time it came up in conversation. She'd tried reading a few how-to books about cooking, but her nerves were too frayed to take anything inside. She started spending more and more time at her computer, comforted by the glittering rows of numbers and code. When the day of the festival finally arrived, Adriana had come to a decision. She would go to the

cook-a-thon and reveal to everyone that she'd used the Mask, and that she couldn't cook. All the hiding and evading conversation had made her more insecure, and she couldn't take it anymore.

Even though it was fairly early in the day, the house where the festival was being held was already packed. Groups of children were running in and out of the house, screaming and laughing. The chatter of voices filled the air, overpowering the faint strains of Carnatic music. The smell of incense mingled with the perfumes of the guests and the aromas from the kitchen- a cornucopia of smells. A comfortable chaos reigned in the house.

As soon as Anil and Adriana entered the house, they were accosted by people,- all greeting them and putting drinks and sweets in their hands. Adriana gulped down her juice and steeled herself to enter the kitchen while Anil went to make a quick bow in front of the Krishna idol which was decorated with flowers. Anil then gave Adriana a last few words of encouragement, but he knew that she would have to deal with this on her own.

There was more chaos in the kitchen. About half a dozen women were in there, doing all manner of things. Some were chopping vegetables, some were putting pots on the stove, and even the microwave was constantly humming. Adriana paused at the door, her heart throbbing, and just as she was about to say something, one of the women saw her. Adriana hardly knew her as they'd only met briefly a couple of times before. The woman, who was the grandmother of one of Anil's cousins said, 'Oh there you are. So glad you could come ... do you want to join the women's club?'

Adriana could only nod.

'Excellent, and my name is Raji, by the way,' the grey-haired woman continued. 'Come over here. Could you chop these potatoes for me?'

Adriana put down her purse and headed to the kitchen counter and with a shaky smile at the women, started cutting the potatoes. A few minutes passed and the chatter of the cooks gradually calmed her. One of the women came over and told her, no, hold the knife like this, it's easier this way, and Adriana thanked her gratefully. The women resumed their chatting, and Adriana only half listened as they spoke about the changes in their lives and reminisced about India. Occasionally they would slip into speaking in Kannada, but sooner or later they would be gently rebuked by Raji, and switch back to English for Adriana's benefit. She soon finished chopping the vegetables, and she took them over to Raji. "Is that ok?" Adriana asked, and Raji smiled and said, 'yes that's

fine, here, put them here..." The rest of the cooking went by in a blur, and as Adriana moved from small task to small task, her movements became surer and surer. She tried her hand at frying the Gulab Jamuns, and after a couple of false starts soon produced perfectly globular sweets. The other women continued chatting and telling her tales of how they'd dealt with their own battles in the kitchen, and how hard it had been to please their in-laws. With every passing moment, Adriana's sense of kinship with the women grew and she felt secure in the knowledge that the path she was on was not such a strange one after all. Every new task she'd attempted was accompanied by a plethora of hints on how to deal with the cooking. She felt a sense of *deja vu* and realized that she was remembering her session with the Mask. All the instant knowledge that she'd had access to while wearing the Mask was now becoming real knowledge and with the help of the happy camaraderie of the women, she felt like she belonged there.

Anil was carrying on a conversation with one of his relatives, but he was hardly paying attention,- he had one eye on the kitchen all the time. He saw Adriana come out and walk up to him holding a tray with some Gulab Jamuns. Before he could speak, she said, 'Hey, do you want to try some Gulab Jamuns? I made them.' It was such a simple sentence, and Anil was sure that no Gulab Jamun would taste as sweet as the pride in Adriana's voice.



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