



On the morning of her anniversary, Seba DasPodara was awakened by a kiss upon her forehead. She slowly opened her eyes, blinking at the face beaming joyously down at her.

"What is it now?" she asked, quickly turning on her side, away from her husband. She could hear him chuckling behind her, but he quickly stopped and fell into his role as the put-upon spouse.

"This is how you treat your husband of fifty years? On the day of your anniversary, no less?"

"Oh, but we have not yet been married for fifty years," Seba corrected, trying unsuccessfully to stifle a smile before Bas could see it. "If you recall, we were married in the afternoon and as yet it is but morning."

Again Bas chuckled. "Well, if you want to be technical about it, you might recall that Kolkata is nine and a half hours ahead of West Virginia."

"So?"

"So, in truth, our anniversary passed fifteen minutes ago."

"Fine. Happy anniversary, then," she said in as unenthusiastic a manner as she could manage. Inside, though, she was smiling. If there was a universal constant to their marriage, it was that Dr. Basudeb DasPodara would always behave like the scientist he was. It was a maddening trait that had, somewhere along the way, become endearing. Seba tried rolling further away from him, to keep him from seeing any slips in her composure, but Bas only laughed again. He had always been able to see through her gruff facade. She decided to let it go and rolled onto her back again to look at him face to face. She regarded him. Could this bald head with the twinkling eyes and the grin of a monkey truly belong to the boy she met for the first time over fifty years ago?

As if thinking something similar, himself, Bas reached underneath his pillow and

retrieved a small, worn, square of paper. It was a photograph. He stared at it for a moment, then at her, then back to the photo and his monkey's grin widened. She took the photo gently from his fingers and, upon turning it over, stared into the time-lost eyes of the little girl she had once been.

Seba remembered the day her uncle had taken the photograph as she helped her mother and her aunts prepare a meal. Uncle Shekil, whose cameras had captured many of their family's photos, was perhaps her favorite uncle. He had eventually given her away at her wedding and had spent a phenomenal amount of money on the purchase of a new 8 mm motion picture camera to record the event.

As Seba looked at the still photograph in her hand, though, she wondered if Uncle Shekil had known how fateful this particular picture would become. There she stood, a fourteen year old girl wearing a simple green and purple sari, smiling sweetly for the camera. Seba wondered what might have happened to her had she chosen at that moment to frown? Would she still be lying in bed next to this bald man, 8,000 miles away from her place of birth?

Bas took the photograph from her fingers. "When I was seventeen, my father gave me this photograph and told me that I was to one day marry this girl. He told me that she was the daughter of a fellow merchant and that it had been amicably arranged. He then sent me off to school and told me that when I finished we would marry. I carried the photograph with me to school and kept it close to me for five years. Each night, before sleep, I would take it out and stare at the girl who was one day to be my wife." Bas leaned in near to her face, holding the photograph closer. "Each night I would ponder to myself how much more beautiful my future wife had become in the intervening day. And every time I look at it now," Bas continued, "I wonder the same thing."

Seba looked into his eyes and smiled. She took no small degree of pride that his face lit up when she did, revealing that her smile still had the same effect on him as when she was a girl. He had first told her of the photograph before their wedding day, not long after they had first been introduced. He had used much the same words then, if not the same language. Despite being deeply nervous, he had seemed quite charming to her then. It was one of the only clear memories she had of her wedding day, as she had been

distracted by a nervousness of her own. For fifty years since, Bas had made it a tradition to bring out the old photograph on important anniversaries and recount the tale of the love-struck young man he had once been. Seba seldom saw the photograph otherwise. She knew exactly where her husband kept it, but would only look upon it when he showed it to her, every five or ten years. She did not wish to tarnish for herself its air of wonder. There was something powerful about such a totem that required it be kept at a distance, lest it become common.

"Fifty years..." Bas said, his eyes becoming cloudy. She nodded and saw that his grin had faded and his face had become serious. For a while he simply stared across their bedroom at nothing in particular, as though weighing a decision. When he spoke, it was no longer in the tone of the playful scoundrel from minutes ago.

"Do you have any regrets?"

"About what?" she replied. "My life?"

"No. About *our* life."

Only then did Seba realize what Bas was truly asking her: He was asking if she regretted having married him. It seemed to her a silly question to ask after all this time, but Seba thought she understood the source of the question. Still, she was not about to let the day begin on so somber a note.

"This is what you ask your wife of fifty years? On the day of our anniversary, no less?"

Bas smiled slightly, but his face remained guarded. It was unlike him to be so serious anymore; especially not with grandchildren in the house. And while she was irritated that he would broach that particular a subject on such a day, she did not want to become angry with him over it. Not only would it belittle the seriousness of his question, but it would put a bad pall on the day itself.

Instead, Seba placed a hand to her husband's lips and said, "Please, do not ask me that now. I will answer you, later, but I would first prefer to see if I survive this day without strangling anyone."

Behind her fingers, Bas's mouth widened into a smile as well. He nodded his concession. "Do you think they are awake yet?"

Seba stopped and sniffed the air. "I don't smell anything burning in the kitchen. Priya must still be asleep."

"Do you want to get up and go see?"

"Mmm. Not just yet," she said, slyly reaching for him beneath the covers.

The occasion of their anniversary was the first time in many years that all of the DasPodaras' children and their extended families had visited them at once. Their daughter Urmi and her husband, Kamal Ganesh, had flown from Rhode Island, bringing with them their twenty-four year old son, Anjit. Urmi's older and very pregnant daughter, Kaya and her husband, Ram Bharadwaj, were traveling on their own and were to arrive in the afternoon in time for the anniversary feast. The DasPodaras' son, Shekil—named for Seba's uncle—and his wife, Priya, had driven in from North Carolina, bringing their son Ranajit and daughter Tejal. Ranajit would be attending *Notre Dame* as a freshman in the fall, while Tejal would be a high school sophomore.

It was wonderful to have so many of their family around them on their anniversary, though it proved to be problematic as there was not space in the house to comfortably sleep nine additional people. Fortunately, Shekil had driven his family to Charleston in their new RV, which took up most of the driveway, forcing everyone else to park on the street. Shekil and Priya slept in it. Kamal and Urmi had taken the guest bedroom, which had once been Urmi's room. They planned to relinquish it to Ram and Kaya tonight and join Shekil and Priya in the RV. The grandchildren stayed in the house itself, though, sleeping on palates on the floor of Bas's study when they weren't arguing over rights to the sleeper sofa. Thus far, Tejal had won that argument two nights in a row. This solved the sleeping arrangements, but did little to combat the congestion of family within the house during non-sleeping hours, especially in the kitchen.

Seba was extremely proud of her kitchen. It was not as spacious as the kitchen of her childhood home, where her mother, sister, aunts and cousins had prepared the family meals, but it was no less an extension of Seba herself. It was where she spent most of her time, now that she had retired from the library, and was a perfect size for her purposes. However, it had not been designed for occupancy greater than three. This was

not usually an issue on family visits, as Urmi was most often the person who helped with cooking. She had practically grown up there and was a fantastic cook in her own right—having been taught by the master herself, as she claimed. Bas had once made the observation that watching Seba and Urmi cook together in the little kitchen was like watching two dancers in their prime, pirouetting around one another, effortlessly and beautifully achieving a masterpiece of motion and cuisine. However, when the presence of Priya was added to the mix, the dance of mother, daughter and daughter-in-law became clumsy, cramped and often explosive.

In most respects, Seba was happy with her daughter-in-law. Priya was beautiful, willful, confident and sweet—a combination of traits Seba had rarely seen outside of herself. However, as far as Seba could tell, Priya had no experience cooking with other women, particularly other women who knew how to cook properly. Having been the primary cook of her own household for the better part of two decades, though, Priya did not take instruction well. Had Priya been raised in India, as Seba had, she would likely have been shaped into a much better cook. Indian households were usually comprised of several related families, and girls from an early age observed and assisted in the cooking. It was a wonderful way to learn technique and skill, but Priya had experienced nothing like it. She had been raised in the United States, by parents raised here as well, and had not been immersed in such tradition.

Practically since their birth, Seba had interrogated Priya's children on the subject of their diet. She had learned that for most of their lives Priya had kept them well-fed and content on a diet of Western dishes, often prepared from a box, packet or can. She rarely prepared traditional Indian cuisine, and only did so at the behest of Shekil and with the aid of a small stack of cook-books and pre-mixed spices. Initially this had alarmed Seba, as it reflected poorly on her for allowing her son to choose an unsuitable wife, or at the very least an unsuitable cook. However, as neither her son nor her grandchildren had ever complained to her about their lot in life and always seemed healthy, Seba had little choice but to conclude they had not been permanently harmed. Priya was suitable in almost all other respects, so Seba had come to accept her despite her culinary eccentricities. In fact, there would have been little friction between the women, were

Priya not insistent on subjecting everyone to her cooking whenever she visited. To sour matters further, she usually did this by attempting to cook her version of Indian food. Seba found this frustrating, as Priya rarely made the necessary preparations for the more complicated traditional Indian dishes she chose to prepare. She often cut corners, like the time she tried to make samosas using store-bought *won ton* wrappers instead of preparing her own pastry dough. It was usually enough to send Seba to bed with a pounding headache.

As Seba emerged from her bedroom, clad once again in her pajamas and dressing-gown, she was not surprised to find Priya in the kitchen, preparing breakfast. Urmi was also in the kitchen, ever the watchful guardian against the scorching of her mother's cookware. A traded glance with her daughter silently assured her that nothing had gone amiss so far.

"Good morning, Grandmama," Tejal called from her place, sprawled on the sofa where she was watching television. There were more morning greetings from the breakfast table where Ranajit was eating scrambled eggs and toast while Anjit, seated next to him, munched on slices of apple. Then all three grandchildren smiled broadly and sang unison, "Happy anniversaryyyy!"

"Your grandpapa told you to say that, didn't he?"

"Yes," they all said.

Seba took a seat at the table next to her grandsons. "And what has become of your grandpapa this morning?"

The boys exchanged glances. "He left with my dad and Uncle Shekil," Anjit said.

"Did he? And where did they go?"

"They wouldn't tell us. They said it was a secret mission."

"I do not doubt it," Seba said. "He has been sneaking around planning something all week. You don't suppose it has anything to do with this anniversary business, do you?" The boys waggled their heads from side to side, indicating uncertainty.

"Mama Seba, what do you want for breakfast?" Priya asked.

"Anjit's apples," Seba said, snatching a slice from her grandson's plate. He yelped appropriately and everyone laughed.

"Well, if no one else needs any breakfast, I declare this kitchen closed," Priya said. The very words sent a wave of relaxation through Seba's spine.

"Oh, Mama Seba, before I forget," Priya continued. "I have a wonderful recipe I was going to use for your anniversary dinner tonight. It's a curry chicken recipe I saw on the *Naked Chef* a few weeks ago."

"*Naked chef?*" Seba asked. "I don't know if I like the sound of that."

Ranjit laughed. "He's not actually naked, Grandma."

"I should hope not," Seba said.

"No, mama," Urmi said. "His name is Jamie Oliver. He's called the Naked Chef because his recipes are stripped down and simple. I've tried them. He's very good."

"Oh," Seba replied. Priya might actually be trusted to attempt stripped down and simple recipes, but Seba kept this to herself.

"I'll make the recipe tonight," Priya said. "Do you have any curry powder on hand?"

"Curry powder?" Seba said slowly. Her relaxation came to an end as the muscles in the back of her neck began to tighten, signaling an impending headache.

"I looked for some in your spice cabinet, but didn't see any," Priya said.

Though it should not have surprised her, Seba could barely believe Priya had just asked for curry powder while standing in her own kitchen, where it was practically law that traditional dishes never used curry powder. If curry spices were to be used, they were to be mixed by hand from cumin and coriander seeds, turmeric, fenugreek and ground mustard seeds, never to be poured pre-mixed from a little tin.

Urmi must have seen something of this in Seba's eyes. Ever the diplomat, she stepped forward to take charge before the urge to hurl something blunt at Priya became too much for Seba to bear.

"Oh, are we out of curry powder?" Urmi said. "Don't worry. We can mix our own. How much does your recipe call for?"

Priya stuffed a bite of scrambled eggs into her mouth and called to her daughter on the couch. "Tejal, bring me my binder."

Tejal sighed loudly, leaned forward and picked up the binder from where it lay on

the coffee table before rising to slouch toward her mother in the kitchen. The front of the plastic binder bore an adhesive label on which was neatly printed "Priya's Recipes." Priya took it from her and flipped through its pages.

"Here it is," she said, sliding the binder across the counter to Urmi.

"Mmm. This looks lovely," Urmi said without a hint of falseness. "But, it doesn't call for curry powder. It calls for curry leaves."

"Curry leaves... curry powder. I just used what I had on hand," Priya said.

Seba nearly choked on a slice of apple and began a coughing fit.

"Are you all right, Grandmama?" Anjit asked.

"I'm fine," she sputtered between coughs.

Urmi began searching through the hanging baskets in the corner of the kitchen where Seba kept her curry leaves. When at last Seba's coughing fit subsided, she was able to croak, "I am out."

"Oh," Priya said. "Well, I'll just go out and get some curry powder, then."

"No!" Seba said, louder than she had intended. "No, I will get it... them... leaves... I will get some curry leaves," she corrected. "I need to get out of the house for a while anyway. My head has begun to ache."

"Mama, why don't you let me get them," Urmi offered.

"No, no. You stay here to help Priya with the preparations." Seba could hardly believe she had said those words. "I will get one of the boys to drive me to the IGS."

"I'll take you!" Tejal cried.

"Tejal, no," Priya said. "You only have your learner's permit."

"But I've been driving for a month already!" Tejal whined.

"No. I don't think you should be driving in the hills here. It's too curvy. And besides, you need a licensed driver with you."

Seba rose to her feet. "I am a licensed driver," she said. She found she could not quite keep the insulted tone from her voice. "My eyes may not be as good as they once were, but I am still a licensed driver. I would be happy for Tejal to drive me to the International Grocery."

"Pleeeeeease!" Tejal begged.

Twenty minutes later, Seba was wondering if she had made the correct decision in allowing Tejal to drive her. Her granddaughter drove fast and turned sharp. Despite being firmly belted in, Seba found herself gripping the plastic handle above the passenger side door just to keep from being flung about in her seat as Tejal sloshed around the curving hillside roads leading out of Seba's neighborhood.

As the last grandchild born, Tejal was forever cemented in Seba's mind as the baby of the family. It was difficult to accept that she was even in high school, let alone driving around in a car. Yet, here she was, a beautiful young woman already, in mostly firm command of a mid-size family sedan.

Tejal turned on the radio and began scanning between stations in search of driving music. "Daddy says I'm already a better driver than mom."

"Watch the road, dear," Seba warned.

"He said she's been a bad driver since before they were married, but I don't think she's *so* bad."

"That car is putting on its brakes, dear."

"She gets a little jumpy in traffic sometimes..."

"Turn here, dear."

And so it went for several minutes as Seba directed Tejal out of their neighborhood and through a right turn onto McCorkle Boulevard, on which the IGS was located some miles to the east. Only on this straight stretch of road, running parallel to the river, was Seba able to calm herself enough to carry on a conversation.

"Dad said I'm lucky to have a grandmother like you."

"That is true," Seba said.

"No, that's not exactly what I meant. Not that it isn't true too," Tejal corrected with a smile. "Dad meant I'm lucky to know you because he never knew either of his grandmothers."

Seba nodded. "Your father was very young when we left Kolkata. He probably doesn't remember his grandparents at all."

"Why did you leave?"

"Mostly because your grandpapa had been offered the chance to study here, and earn his Ph.D. That was 1966. We have been here ever since."

"What's it like being married for fifty years?" Tejal asked.

Seba considered this for a moment. "It is a lot like being married for forty nine years."

Tejal laughed. "No, really. I want to know your secret."

"My secret, eh?"

"Yeah. Most of my friends' parents have been divorced at least once. I just want to know how you found a love that lasted this long."

After a long moment of thought, Seba answered, "I don't know if I have the answer you're looking for. Indian and American marriages... they are like similar looking trees that grow from very different seeds. The leaves of the laurel tree and the curry tree look similar, but the laurel produces bay leaves and the curry tree curry leaves. They have very different flavors."

"What is it with you and curry leaves?" Tejal said. "Not that I'm complaining, but it seemed like some sort of emergency that you had to go out and get some."

Seba raised her eyebrows. "You asked me about marriages in India, and I am trying to tell you of them. Do not change the subject."

"Sorry. Go ahead, Grandmama."

"As I was saying, marriages in India are often entered into for different reasons than in this country."

"Like, arranged marriages, right?"

"In a sense, yes. But that is not exactly the heart of the matter. In arranging a marriage, the parents and families of both children make the decisions. It is like a business negotiation, with many factors that must be carefully weighed. Will the girl be a suitable wife for the man? Does she have the skills necessary to care for him and their future children? Does he have the income necessary to provide for such a family? Are both children from good families? Will she be able to get along with his family? Will her family provide a sufficient dowry? It can be very complicated."

"Mom said your marriage was arranged like that."

"That is true."

"And you really didn't know Grandpapa at all before you married him?"

"No."

"So, how did you know you loved him if you'd never met him?"

"I did not love him," Seba said.

Tejal's mouth dropped open and she gaped at Seba in shock.

"Young lady, keep your eyes on the road!"

"I'm sorry," Tejal said, her face snapping forward, her hands gripping the steering wheel even tighter. "Sorry, sorry. I'm just... surprised that... I mean... that's just... I can't..." Her voice trailed off into a harsh grunted, "uhgh."

"I told you. Marriage in India is very different. Love is not at issue in the negotiations."

"But... but, you do love Grandpapa, right?"

"Very, very much," Seba said. "It is a love that has grown, as I said, much like a tree. It starts very small and becomes greater over time. I hope that when you marry one day yours will as well."

"Okay. I still don't get it, though. I mean, I thought Indian marriage was all about love. Why else would there be all those books like *The Kama Sutra*?"

"And what would you know of *The Kama Sutra*, young lady?"

"Um. I mean... I've heard of it."

"Mm hmm," Seba said in a skeptical tone. "Don't misunderstand, then. Love is very important in India, but it is something that is usually cultivated after the marriage has been sealed. Books like that were written partially to help in the process of cultivating love. One day you will better understand."

"I don't know. I don't think I could marry someone I didn't love, or hadn't even met."

"Oh, don't worry. You will be meeting him soon. We've invited him to the dinner tonight."

"What?!"

Seba grinned broadly. "Only joking," she said.

Tejal let out a long breath of relief. "Don't say stuff like that. You nearly gave me a heart attack!"

Seba laughed. "I'm sorry. I had to say it. Your grandpapa wasn't here to make the joke first."

"No arranged marriage for me, then?"

"No. You will marry whomever you choose to marry. And I pray that he will love you and care for you for fifty years and more."

"Yeah. How `bout pray I find a boyfriend before graduation, first."

"Now you are joking, no?" Seba asked. "A girl as beautiful girl as you is telling me that the boys are not fighting one another for your attentions?"

"They're not even arguing over them," Tejal said. "Maybe it *would* be easier if someone arranged my marriage for me. Then I wouldn't have to worry about dating."

"Yes, but that is how things are done in this country. With no negotiators working to assure your future on your behalf, you are left to do it on your own. However, dating gives you the advantage of trying out relationships with different people to see which fits you the best. The disadvantage, I think, is that people become accustomed to shedding away their loves when they no longer fit. The divorce rate grows high. In India, it is very low."

"So you're saying Indian marriages are better?"

"No. I am only saying they are different. Not all marriages in India work the same as mine did. And I'll tell you a secret... Boys can be slow to act, no matter their culture. Just because none have yet summoned the courage to ask you on a date does not mean there is no one who wants to."

Tejal's face brightened. "I'll remember that."

"Remember to turn, as well. We've reached our destination."

After a somewhat frightening left turn across two lanes of oncoming traffic, Tejal was able to pull onto the side street the International Grocery Store was cornered on and into the small gravel parking lot behind it. They entered through the back door.

Inside the IGS, they shopped together and Seba attempted to impress upon her granddaughter the art of picking the best from the bin of sealed plastic envelopes of curry

leaves. It was difficult to find fresh curry leaves in West Virginia and sometimes you had to make do with what was available. Seba also bought a jar of tandoori masala, as she was running low, and a slab of tamarind, with which Urmi could make a nice sauce for the samosas Priya was no doubt wrapping in *won ton* dough even then.

"I hope the curry leaves help momma's chicken," Tejal said as they started the car for the drive home. "She'd kill me if she knew I told you this, but she spent a long time searching for a recipe worthy of this dinner. You don't know how many awful experiments we've had to sit through for the past few weeks. Her recipe binder only has the ones she thinks she's perfected. She's probably embarrassed that she'd been using the wrong ingredient all this time."

"Ah, well," Seba said, feeling warmed by the knowledge of her daughter-in-law's efforts. "I'm sure it will be delicious."

After they had driven on for a few blocks, Tejal spoke up again. "I have another question about Indian marriage. What if, like, there were a girl and boy in India who liked one another and wanted to get married, but were already arranged to marry other people? Would they still have to do it?"

"Would they have to? Perhaps. Does anyone *have* to do anything, though?"

"I don't understand."

"In life there are always choices to make and consequences for those choices. Could two young people betrothed to others choose to marry? It is possible. But there would be consequences. Sometimes, dire consequences."

"Like what?"

Seba was quiet for a few moments, contemplating whether to continue in this line of questioning. She decided, though, that it was best to be completely honest with her granddaughter regarding the facts of her heritage.

"Well," Seba began, "in India, it was not unheard of for girls to be killed for breaking their marriage pact, or for having intimate relations with a man outside of marriage."

"Wow," Tejal said in a somber tone. She was quiet for several seconds as she continued to absorb what she had heard. "Wow."

"Know, though, that it was not a common occurrence, even in my day. The struggle is not between choosing life or death. Mostly, it is a struggle between the heart and tradition. An obedient daughter does what her parents tell her to do, regardless of her feelings," Seba said. Her own mouth then surprised her by forming and speaking words she had had no intention of uttering. "That was the choice I had to make."

Tejal nearly ran off the road. Somehow, between gaping at her grandmother and struggling with the steering wheel, she managed to maneuver into a parking lot and brought the car to a halt. For some moments the girl remained speechless, her hands shaking from both the adrenaline rush and from the shock at what she had just heard.

"You... you had a boyfriend? Before you married Grandpapa?"

"No," Seba said. "Well, yes. No, no. I..." Seba paused. "I don't think we should speak of it in those terms. Let us say there was a boy whom I thought I wanted to marry."

"What was his name? Did you love him? Did he love you?" Tejal sang, barely able to finish one question before another formed.

Seba regretted having opened this particular can, but it was open now and there was nothing that could be done about it.

"His name was Sanjay. And yes," Seba said, "I think I did love him."

"Ohmygawd!" Tejal squealed, clapping her hands against the steering wheel in excitement. "I can't believe it! My grandmother had a boyfriend! Mom never told me about this."

"This is but *one* of the many things your mother knows nothing about."

"I can't believe you just told me that!"

"Believe me, I had not intended to," Seba said. "I think, though, that it has been weighing on my mind—today being the day that it is."

"Would your father have really killed you if he found out about Sanjay?"

"No. No. Sanjay and I had done nothing wrong. We were simply very fond of one another. We were seventeen. Sanjay told me that he loved me and wanted one day to marry me. It made me so happy I could hardly stand up. And my friend Prema and I used to spend hours talking and dreaming about the day when Sanjay and I would marry."

We did not know how that worked, though.

"One day, I asked my mother how old I had to be to marry someone. It was then that I learned of my betrothal."

"What did you do?"

Seba gave Tejal a long blank look. "Your grandfather's name is not Sanjay, is it? What do you think I did?"

Tejal's glee left her eyes and Seba could see that the girl was taken aback at the abruptness of her statement. Then, she saw a realization form there.

"You followed tradition and not your heart," the girl said. Seba nodded.

"Was it hard?"

Seba took a deep breath and for a moment she could almost feel tears welling up as they had five decades ago as she stared into the dark face of the boy she left behind. "Telling Sanjay I could not see him any more, could not marry him, could not love him... that was the most difficult thing I have ever done."

"How did Sanjay take it?"

"He left," Seba said. "He stood watch outside my uncle's house during our wedding ceremony. I could feel him there. Could feel his eyes on me even through the garden wall. I was afraid he would interrupt the ceremony and that my uncles would beat him. But he only watched, waiting for me to emerge from the house as the bride of another. And when I did, I saw him. I saw him turn his back and walk away. I do not think he stopped walking until he was no longer in Kolkata, though I never knew where he went."

"And Grandpapa never knew about Sanjay?"

Seba waggled her head. "Your grandpapa was a wise old soul even then. From the day I met him I knew that he would be a good husband for me and would care for me for all his days. I believe that he loved me long before we met. And I believe he could sense my broken heart, for he set about mending it. He did so very slowly and gently until years had passed and I found that it had grown whole once again and was forever his."

"That's so sweet."

"I suspect he did know about Sanjay, though I never asked him. I do remember that eight years after we were married, your grandpapa had decided to turn down the offer to come to West Virginia. He mysteriously changed his mind shortly after Prema told me that Sanjay had returned to Kolkata."

"Sanjay came back for you?"

"I don't know. We were all on a plane before I could even consider it."

Tejal laughed, but it was a bittersweet sound at best. After a long silence, she unbuckled her seat-belt, leaned across and gave her grandmother a hug.

"Thanks," she whispered. "Dad was right. I am lucky to have a grandmother like you."

Seba saw something familiar in her granddaughter's smile and it made her laugh.

"I think tonight, after the dinner, you should ask your grandpapa to show you *the picture*," Seba said. "He will know what you mean."

The afternoon passed uneventfully, save for the cluster of cooks squirming around one another in the kitchen as the anniversary dinner was prepared. Other than the donation of the curry leaves, Seba decided to leave Priya and Urmi to their work with no words of advice or even supervision. Seba was happy to see Tejal taking an interest and even lending a hand in the cooking. Bas, Shekil and Kamal had returned from their "secret mission," but gave no clue as to its purpose. They and the grandsons spent much of their time in the DasPodara's back yard shed, where Seba concluded their big surprise must be hidden.

At 4:45, Seba's granddaughter Kaya and her husband Ram arrived and talk quickly turned to the subject of the great-grandchild that Kaya was soon to bring into the world and of the many difficulties of pregnancy.

At 6:30 the anniversary dinner was served and a magnificent feast it was. All of the dishes were delicious, but Seba decided that, despite the unlikelihood of it all, Priya's chicken curry was by far the most delectable dish on the table. Before she could think of a reason not to, Seba said as much to Priya and was amazed at the glow of pride from her daughter-in-law's face.

After dessert, Bas made a toast to his lovely bride of fifty years. As per tradition, and at Tejal's request, he regaled everyone with the story of the picture and of the young lovestruck man he had been and still was today. Following the toast, he asked the family to join him in the back yard.

The sun had almost completely set, casting only a few long shadows across the grass. Then, the motion sensing lights came on and Seba saw that there were several rows of folding chairs set up, facing a projection screen. Behind the chairs was a motion picture projector, trailing an orange extension cord across the lawn. On the projector's sprocket was a reel of 8 mm film. Everyone took their seats, with Bas and Seba on the front row. As Shekil threw the switch on the projector, lights came up and Seba was utterly amazed to see the sad face of a younger version of herself appear upon the screen. The young girl was wearing a red and white sari embroidered in gold, her head adorned with flowers.

"How?" Seba asked her eyes brimming with tears and wonder. "Where did you get this film?"

"Your uncle. He sent it to me, not long before he died, sixteen years ago. It has taken me all month to find a projector to play it on. Happy anniversary."

While the film lasted for only eight minutes and had no audio track to accompany it, it felt far longer to Seba. The only audio track she needed was the one playing out in her mind, for there she could hear the sounds of the musicians playing. She could hear the whispers of her family and her future family. She could smell the sweet gulab jamin balls that Bas's aunts would soon stuff into his mouth. And she could feel the knot of sickening tension in her stomach as she worried what the boy on the other side of the garden fence might be about to do. Now, though, the pain of this was very distant to her. It had become a pain of sympathy felt for an old friend who is troubled. It was no longer personal. Only the joy of a lost moment regained shone at full intensity for her. Seba DasPodara was able to watch and enjoy her wedding for the first time in her life.

"Bas," she whispered into her husband's ear. "You have given me fifty wonderful years and a beautiful loving family that will soon grow larger. My love, I have no regrets."

The tail end of the film slapped against the projector, bathing the screen in white light. Bas kissed her gently upon the forehead, as he had when he awakened her, and then upon the lips.

“Neither have I,” he said. “Neither have I.”

the end