

# November 26, 2008

## **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Railway Station - Priya**

The station is quiet. I hug Ananya and run to the toilets to hide. The massacre hasn't woken her up yet, the only reason we're still alive. I look at her soft tender cheeks and the shiny name necklace resting on her delicate neck. I feel a rush of love. The kind I've never felt before.

The stalls are overflowing with scared survivors. They are clinging onto their last hope. Swallowing their pride, they are standing all over the mush. After all, does it even matter? Isn't life more precious than one's dignity? In their scramble to protect themselves, they've surely pushed on others, stomped on bodies and turned to self-preservation. But this is no ordinary tragedy unfolding.

Despite being covered in blood and dirt, they didn't let out a whimper. A small sound would cost them their lives. The footsteps suddenly sound again, this time closer than ever. The words were spoken in Urdu, but we all know Hindi well enough to be able to understand what was said. "Have you checked the bathrooms?"

We all huddle up closer and closer, and closer still until someone lets out a cry. Everyone turns to me, saying things that make my ears bleed. I look down at Ananya...

... and realise she's awake.

A gun is cocked. Footsteps rush into the toilet and it started raining bullets again.

### **Half an hour later (Inspector Ranjit Kumar)...**

"Rakesh and Vijay, check the platform. Aditya, Arjuna, check the small shops. Krishna, Rohit, check the control rooms. If you find any wounded that are likely to survive, bring them to the front of the station. Leave the rest. We won't be getting any assistance for a while."

Gaurav looks at me. "Sir?". I ask him to follow me and he knows perfectly where we're going. The toilets. We brace ourselves for what we'll find. It is a gruesome sight. There's no way anyone could have survived the attack. We walk away depressed. Just as we leave the toilets, we hear a cry. We rush back in and search through the pile of bodies. Grasped in her dead mother's arms is a small baby, unharmed. She's a striking resemblance of her mother. Fighting back tears, Gaurav calls out her name from her small necklace. A....n....

Ananya.

## **Cafe Leopold - Sharma**

I walk through the grand entrance into Mumbai's most famous Cafe. The big red sign reads the same as it has for years, 'Leopold Cafe and Bar, Since 1871'. I look around to see what everyone else is having. I want to order what this Cafe is famous for, not some random tea or coffee. I see a few foreign tourists and tell them about my hotel business. At first, they seem disinterested but then as I continue, they get more interested. Tourists are always willing to spend more, which would be great for my business. After all, I hear they have high income.

To impress the tourists, I order for the same as them (in English). The waiter looks puzzled. I curse him in Hindi and tell him in English to stop looking like a stunned mullet. The tourists are again impressed. The man calls me 'contumelious' and his wife laughs. I laugh with them because they don't know that I don't know what it means. Plus, it's not like it'd mean anything bad or insulting. After thinking for a while, I call him contumelious too.

A shock slowly registers on his face. Then he says a string of curses that make my ears hurt. What did I say wrong? Then comes a crash and he stops mid sentence. In fact, that man won't be talking for a while. He is dead.

An attack!

I duck down and take the contents of his wallet. That's probably enough for a new couch and some lollies for my granddaughters. My son probably won't let me use this money because he's all 'against stealing'. But it doesn't matter where the money comes from.

People drop dead like flies as I go and collect the money in their wallets. As more die, I start collecting whole wallets. The shooting stops. They've probably left, thinking everyone is dead.

I make a dash for the cash register and just as I reach to grab the money, a pain shoots up my leg. Then there's another pain in my back...

Then, there's silence, like the silence after a mind blowing performance.

**13 minutes later (Inspector Ranjit Kumar)...**

"We're getting good at this, aren't we?", I ask. Everyone nods, tired and dirty. There aren't any survivors, it's quite obvious, but we search anyway. After we split up, Gaurav and I go to the kitchen. On the way, I nearly trip over a body. It's near the cash register and the hands of the man are stuffed with wallets and money. Suddenly, a bolt of recognition hits me. It's Dad...

## **Cama and Albless Hospital - Karthik**

These terrorist attacks will be the death of me. Everywhere I go, people keep asking me where the next attack will be, how many terrorists there are and other irrelevant information. I repeat myself hoarse. "You'll be safe if you stay at home."

Plus, to make it even worse, I'm stuck outside the Cama and Albles Hospital.

Suddenly, a bullet whizzes past my ears. They're here! I rush inside to protect the doorway. We had trained for situations like this. Prakash takes the other side and asks me to go up to the main floor to warn everyone. I refuse to abandon him, but he forces me to.

The nurses are rounding up the patients, many of whom had heard of the previous attacks. Eyes wide with terror, a nurse lets out a scream. Somewhere under the mass of dirt and blood, she spotted the brown uniform of a police officer.

I rush down, only to find Prakash slumped down, nearly dead. He tries calling Ranjit but is unable to dial his number. His hands are shaking badly and even before I can run to assist him, he smiles at me. He tells me he won't survive. A bullet is in his stomach and another had grazed his knee. He stands near the doorway and shoots with all his might. I doubt he killed anyone before he went down, but that certainly took guts...

A new fire burns in me this time. Inspired by his fight I resume shooting...

**A few minutes later...**

Ugh, that sickening smell...

I wake up, covered in blood, dirt and sweat. Ranjit is looking at me, shaking me hard and asking me questions. The only thing I can let out is, "Prakash....."