

Friends to Love

A love story that everybody saw coming

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

Eleven Days Apart

Anandhi Sekar was born eleven days before Kathiravan Subramani, in the same railway hospital, to two men who worked in the same workshop and had never once spoken to each other.

They corrected that on the fourth of August, in the corridor outside the ward, where Sekar from the machine shop and Subramani from the crane gang discovered that they had been standing forty feet apart for nine years without knowing it, and that they had been allotted quarters in the same row.

Block 12 and Block 13, Fifth Street, Golden Rock Railway Colony, Ponmalai, Tiruchirappalli.

One wall between them.

Their wives worked it out faster and more usefully. By the time the babies were three months old, Rajeswari and Vasantha had established that Anu slept badly and Kathir slept like a sack of cement, that one household had a working mixie and the other did not, and that if you put a child down on a mat in either front room, the other woman would look at it while you went to the tap.

This is not a story about two people who met.

They did not meet. They were issued to each other, the way railway quarters are issued: by allotment, by seniority, by a list on a board outside an office, and with no consultation whatsoever.

* * *

Golden Rock is a town that the railways built to repair trains, and it runs on the same principle as the trains.

The siren goes at seven-thirty in the morning and again at four in the afternoon, and it can be heard from every house in the colony, and it is not a suggestion. At seven-thirty the streets empty. At four they fill. In between, the colony belongs to women, children, and the ninety-eight-year-old grandfather at quarter 9 who has outlived three station superintendents and does not intend to stop.

The houses are identical because they were built identical. Two rooms and a kitchen, a small front veranda with a half-wall, a back yard four feet wide, a compound wall of country brick. Every family in that row has painted their door a different colour for the single purpose of being able to say *ours is the green one*.

The story continues.

Twenty-six chapters and an epilogue. 113 pages.

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