Hard Hands

A story about temper, and what to do with it

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

Hard Hands

There is a fault in batting called hard hands, and it is the only fault in the game that is caused entirely by wanting.

It works like this. A ball comes at you. Your hands, without being asked, go out to meet it — they push, they commit, they get there first. And the ball, instead of dying against a bat that was waiting for it, comes off the face with all its own speed still in it and goes to a man standing four metres away at slip who does not even have to move.

That is all it is. Half a second of going out to meet something.

You cannot coach it out of a boy by talking about his hands, because his hands are not the problem. His hands are the last thing in a chain that starts a long way further back, in a place nobody can see, where a boy has decided that the correct response to a thing coming at him fast is to go and get it before it gets him.

Arivazhagan Pandian had hard hands from the age of nine until he was twenty-four, and he was told so, in those words, roughly eleven thousand times, by a man called Nagarajan who never once raised his voice while saying it.

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He was born in Madurai on the third of March 1998, in the front room of a rented house in Arasaradi, four hundred metres from his father's workshop, in a monsoon failure year.

His father was Pandian. Everybody called him Pandian; there was no other name available, and his own mother had called him Pandian, and there is a signboard at Arasaradi that says PANDIAN ENGINEERING WORKS in letters that were painted in 1994 and repainted in 2009 by a man who got the S slightly wrong.

It was a fabrication shop. Two welding sets, a cutting machine, a drill, a vice, a bench, an eight-foot roller shutter and a floor of packed earth with a concrete apron at the front. Gates. Window grilles. Staircase railings. Water tank stands. The collapsible steel frame that goes over a shop front. Repairs on anything anybody brought.

It employed, at its best, four people. It employed, more usually, two: Pandian and a man called Ismail who had been there since 1996 and who in twenty-eight years never once called him anything but *saar*.

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The story continues.

Twenty-six chapters and an epilogue. 101 pages.