

Proof Copy

An introvert's love story

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

A Man Who Notices Everything

The mark for *something is missing here* is a caret.

It is a small tent, drawn under the line, at the exact point where the absence is. Then you go out to the margin and write what should have been there.

Chandran Sivagnanam had been making that mark for six years, about forty times a day, with complete accuracy, in other people's sentences.

* * *

He was a proofreader at Aruvi Pathippagam, first floor, Big Street, Triplicane, above a shop that sold brass lamps and, for reasons nobody had ever established, cricket balls.

Aruvi published about nineteen books a year in Tamil — novels, two poets, a great deal of non-fiction that nobody read and that mattered — and it had four full-time employees and a proprietor of sixty-four called Ramanathan, who was known to everybody including his wife as RK, and who had not thrown anything away since 1987.

Chandru's desk was by the window that faced the tank. In the mornings there was light on it until about eleven and after that there was not, and he had never once mentioned this to anybody in six years.

What he did all day was this.

He took a set of proofs — a novel, a memoir, three hundred pages of somebody's life set in eleven-point type — and he read every character on every page twice, and he found what was wrong.

A missing dot over a letter, which in Tamil turns one word into a different word and occasionally into an insult. The three Tamil l-sounds, which look nothing alike on paper and which people who have spoken the language for sixty years still confuse in writing. A quotation mark facing the wrong way. A line of type set in the wrong weight because somebody's keyboard had slipped. A page number repeated. A chapter that began on a left-hand page when every other chapter in the book began on a right.

He was, RK said, the best pair of eyes in Tamil publishing, and RK had been in Tamil publishing since 1981 and did not say things like that.

The story continues.

Twenty-six chapters and an epilogue. 94 pages.

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