Rain on Rock

A love story with terms and conditions

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

The Woman on the Slab

Mugilan Rajendran arrived in Kallanur with two bags, fourteen books and eight months.

The bags were a nylon holdall with a broken zip and a cloth sack that had once held forty kilos of ponni rice. The books were the ones that had survived two years in Chennai — the polity, the modern history, the economy, four NCERTs with their covers gone, a Tamil literature reader bound in brown paper, and a stack of answer booklets from a test series he had paid eight thousand rupees for and stopped attending in the ninth week.

The eight months were what he had left before the examination, and he had counted them on the bus, out of the window, one for every kilometre stone that said something he could read.

The bus came in at ten past six and the sky had the particular bruised colour that means the north-east monsoon has made up its mind. Kallanur's bus stand was a tin roof on four pillars with a tea stall at one end and a man selling plastic buckets at the other. Beyond it the road went up towards the hills, and the hills were not visible, and that was how he knew it was going to rain properly and

not just threaten.

He asked the bucket man for Kamarajar Street and the bucket man pointed with his chin without stopping what he was doing.

Door number seventeen was a small blue house with a gate that had to be lifted. The upstairs room had its own staircase running up the outside wall, which was the reason he had taken it over the phone without seeing it, because a separate staircase meant he could come and go at three in the morning without a landlady forming opinions.

The landlady formed opinions anyway. Her name was Pushpa and she was sixty-one and she stood at the bottom of the staircase while he carried the sack up, and by the time he came down for the second bag she had established that he was from Sankarankovil side, that his father worked in the transport corporation, that he had a sister who was married in Rajapalayam, and that he had come here to write the government exam.

'Which exam?'

'Civil services.'

'IAS?'

'The same exam,' he said. 'Whether it becomes IAS is a different question.'

The story continues.

Twenty-six chapters and an epilogue. 161 pages.

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