

The Late Cut

A comedy about arriving late

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

The Late Cut

The late cut is the only shot in cricket that you play after the ball has gone past you.

Every other stroke is an interception. You work out where the thing is going, you get there first, and you hit it. The whole apparatus of batting — the trigger movement, the front foot, the head over the ball — is a machine for arriving in time.

The late cut is not that. The late cut is played when the ball is already level with you and going away, and the bat comes down at an angle and touches it, and it runs down to third man for four, and the whole shot consists of having waited about a tenth of a second longer than any sensible person would.

It is a shot made entirely out of being late.

Gopalakrishnan Subramani has been late for everything since 1992 and has considered this, on and off, for about twenty years, to be the single greatest piece of consolation available to him.

It is not much of a consolation. He is aware that it is not much. But it is a documented fact about the sport of cricket that there is exactly one stroke in the book that requires you to do nothing while

the moment arrives, and let it come level, and only then decide — and he has never got over the feeling that somebody, somewhere, was making a point.

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He found it at eleven, in a coaching manual with a broken spine that belonged to the school library and that nobody had taken out since 1994.

There were photographs in it of an Englishman in a cap demonstrating the strokes, one to a page, and under each photograph a caption of about forty words explaining what the feet were doing. Gopi read the whole thing twice in a week and could not reproduce a single one of the shots.

He went back, perhaps eleven times over the following two years, to page ninety-four. Page ninety-four was the only page in that book where the instruction was not *get there* but *wait*.

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There is a difference between the two things, and it is the whole of this book, and it is about one word long, and he did not find it until he was thirty-one years old with his arm on fire over a vessel of halwa in his uncle's shop.

The story continues.

Twenty-six chapters and an epilogue. 95 pages.