

*As It Was Written*



S U J A T H A   H A M P T O N

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I already looked in that bag you stashed in your trunk. Is all that nasty oil for *our* problem or for *yours*?”

Manoj stroked his hair defensively, but remained quiet under the table, afraid to get up. Gita sank lower and lower and seemed to completely fade away, hidden inside her puffy, cotton sari. Dr. Nair, unsettled when he lost the floor, put both his hands in the air and announced to the general assembly, “Children, stop it, stop it. I am tired. I have had a most vexing trip.”



They entered his life one just after the other, like perfectly flowing lines of verse: Veena, Mira, Usha, Dhanya and Shanti, aged twenty-six, twenty-four, twenty-two, seventeen and fifteen, because there was nothing he loved more than the sight of his beloved wife pregnant, with one in her arms, and another wrapped around her leg. Her long, black, lush, wavy hair was ever so much longer, blacker, lusher and wavier when she was carrying one of these gorgeous girls. Only girls could make a beautiful woman even more beautiful, or so the wives’ tale told. It was certainly so in Jaya Nair’s case.

The five daughters of Dr. Raman Nair were legendary in their domestic abilities, in their precocious talents, in their gracious temperaments, and of course, in their prodigious size. Never had a family of American-born Indian girls been given the same careful guidance with regard to traditional cooking, from shopping for the ingredients, to preparation of the vegetables, to grinding of the spices with a mortar and pestle. If they were together, they could prepare an entire *sadhya* themselves, without the assistance of their mother. For this alone, they were held in high regard by all the friends and colleagues of Dr. Raman Nair. He looked at them always with great pride.

Then these same girls could sing, they could dance, they each played the piano. They studied other things; they liked to study things; they learned things quickly and used the things they learned to learn other things, like learning violin because they played the piano, or learning Italian because they knew French. They taught each other the things they learned, and sometimes Dr. Raman Nair would peep into the room of his youngest daughter, Shanti, to catch her leaned against the shoulder of

his oldest daughter, Veena, watching her *chechi* finish a complicated stitch in a hand-knit sweater that later they would present him as a surprise for no reason at all, though it was summer, because the yarn was on sale then, and they were, in addition to all their other qualities, frugal as well.

The beautiful daughters of Dr. Raman Nair laughed all the time and when the doorbell rang, they all went running along with Taj the dog, because they were similarly eager to have one more person around, or three or four, and if there were four, they would immediately call it a party and begin to cook and laugh, and pull out the photo albums that showed the pictures of the last time these four people came to visit, or the first time these people came to visit, and they would feed them with great care, and one would be standing beside to refill the glasses, and another would heap in a bit more fish, or rice, or a small spoonful of mango pickle, and they would chatter just right about current events, or funny stories, and ask just the right number of questions about just the right subjects, with just the right level of curiosity without nosiness, and when these four people left, they would get into their car and sigh and say to each other, “I can’t wait until the next time they throw a party.” Even if there never had been a party, but simply some saris to pick up, or some check to drop off, or simply stopping by because they were in the neighborhood. Dr. Raman Nair would close the door behind the company and turn back into his house, glowing with great pride.

Everyone in the world loved the daughters of Dr. Raman Nair, and perhaps it was because of this that their enormous, gigantic, astounding size made so little difference to them. They did not seem to be bothered that together they could barely fit in Veena’s adorable Audi. When they all took a deep breath and inserted themselves, cushioned against each other and certain that the steel frame of the car would hold them in place until they reached their destination, they didn’t even mention the discomfort. And because they could each sew, they looked spectacular always. Their clothes fit to perfection, and their hair was so remarkably lustrous and thick and their faces were, every one of them, absolutely breathtaking, so that really, between their irresistible personalities, their sensational clothes and their the supershiny, extra-glossy, curly or wavy or mirror-straight hair, they turned heads everywhere they went.

And because they were so happy, and so bright, and so accomplished, and so beloved, the five fat daughters of Dr. Raman Nair had

healthy self-esteem and no body issues. And because they had healthy self-esteem and no body issues, they were accustomed to their fair share of attention from men (though they really didn't pay much heed), because nothing is more attractive in the long run than a woman who feels she is beautiful, especially if she never bothers to think about it at all. And beyond all that, the five fat daughters of Dr. Raman Nair were endowed with the largest, juiciest, roundest and most irresistible pairs of breasts ever seen in the universe. And the five pairs of breasts of Dr. Raman Nair's daughters were a never-ending source of distress among hotel porters, taxi drivers, shoe salesmen, and the diminutive clerks at the India store, who were often forced to share small spaces with these five girls and their ten breasts, crammed in tight, leaning forward, squeezed together. Every once in a while, one of these men would whimper aloud from the strain of reining in his hands and mouth. He would turn in his lips and his eyes would tear up and then he would utter a pitiful whimper and drop his gaze in shame. Being the girls that they were, when this happened, they all gathered in closer to assure he was okay, they felt his head, they held his hands, and they looked deeply into his eyes with theirs, long-lashed and limpid. Every once in a while, one of the whimpering men thus fainted into their formidable chests, never to know that he had been there. When this happened, the girls would lower him gently to the ground, they would loosen his shirt and massage his chest, and once in a while, Veena, Mira, Usha, Dhanya or once even Shanti, would have to give him CPR. When the poor man awoke, he would be told by his coworkers that he had been laid down, undressed, massaged and essentially kissed by one of the five fat daughters of Dr. Raman Nair while the others encircled him on their knees, bent forward with concern, hands resting on his thighs or abdomen. When he realized he had slept through it all, he would curse his weak constitution, and wish he had the talent to have faked the whole thing.

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