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**On business in New Delhi**, a young woman who has it all is robbed in a market and finds herself adrift. Desperate, muddy, penniless and drenched by the monsoon, she struggles to survive. When a wizened old nun takes her under the Sacred Heart's wing, she realizes that having Ninety Percent of the Pie isn't so important after all.

**The fragrance of jasmine lingering on her white blouse**, Katherine sank into the lobby's sofa. She looked great in this white and teal outfit, tall and twiggy with raven hair gathered under a Panama hat. But despite having all morning to get ready, she felt flustered, not prepared for a difficult meeting with Bangalore Software.

A young guy burst through the revolving doors. Skinny as a spade handle, he couldn't be much more than eighteen.

"Memsah'b Mitchell?" he asked, bowing low.

She nodded.

"I am Rudyard. I take you to Hotel Air India for Bangalore."

Katherine jogged to keep up with him as he rushed outside, to a tiny Fiat. "Where's the Maharanee's limousine?"

"Broken, Memsah'b."

Frowning, Katherine squeezed into the rear seat and nestled her briefcase on her lap, thankful that she had her satellite phone, a safeguard against getting lost. No need to worry about her presentation, she'd sent the charts ahead by secure New Delhi Courier.

She wound down the window as the Fiat jerked forward and took off. The vehicle stunk of cigarettes and she didn't want it rubbing off on her. Yuck, this secondhand smoke and humidity would ruin her hair. "Looks like the sky's going to open up."

"Monsoon, Memsah'b."

The car rattled on for a mile before Katherine realized she'd left her passport and plane tickets at the Maharanee Hotel.

“Rudyard, we have to go back.” Unnerving, unraveling, to misplace an important document, especially when she had her biggest promotion hanging in the balance. She must get it together now, Deputy Director of Marketing sounded good.

“Memsah’b, we don’t have time.”

“I’ve left my passport at the Maharanee.”

“Won’t need it.”

Katherine didn’t feel safe without it. But if she got in a jam with the authorities, the hotel would vouch for her, and she’d been smart enough to fasten her money belt around her waist.

Kids hopped out of the way as Rudyard wheeled the Fiat down a side street. He clipped a pile of boxes, knocking them over and slammed on the brakes to avoid a sacred cow. His shoulder jerked as if had Parkinson’s.

Raindrops hit the windshield, the monsoon beginning to spit. The Fiat crawled forward, nudging people aside, but they quickly closed in behind the car. Going back to the Maharanee now, through this mob, would be out of the question.

Rudyard took another puzzling turn into a packed market square. Lord, she didn’t know where they were. “Why couldn’t we have stuck to the main streets?”

“Shortcut.”

“Some shortcut! We’re lost.”

“Memsah’b not lost.”

The engine misfired, shaking the Fiat. He pulled to the side of the crowded square. The car coughed and died.

“Now what?”

“Walk, Memsah’b.”

“Can’t you restart it?”

Rudyard cranked the starter several times. Nothing. He hopped out and she climbed out as well. “This way Memsah’b, Air India not far.”

“What about your car?”

“Fix later.” He barged on, leading her.

They entered a street so narrow the stone buildings on either side appeared to be touching overhead. Rudyard shot forward and she had to run to catch up.

She took shallow breaths, not liking the curry-smoke there. A weedy man whispered from the side in English, "Take you to my sister? Bed good." He scurried after her.

"Go away."

"You want my brother, Memsah'b?"

Katherine shuddered. She wanted to sprint away from everyone. A peddler sidled up, holding what looked like a small onion. "Best opium from Thailand, very cheap."

"No! Certainly not."

Rudyard dodged around a woman who had two children in tow, kids with muddy feet and legs, poor things. Then he plunged into another market square.

Katherine glanced around, comparing their lot with hers at home. She had a sleek BMW in her garage. Most of these people didn't even own shoes, let alone bicycles. But Delhi works as it is, and even though it's noisy and packed, the people don't run into each other. Jesus, though, she stuck out like a sore thumb there.

Catching Rudyard, she yelled, "Where are you taking me?"

"We're near the Hotel Air India, Memsah'b."

Rough hands pushed her in the back, shoving her face-first into a fruit and vegetable stand. Her Panama hat flew off. Her case slipped from her grasp as people tugged at her. Katherine grabbed for her money belt, finding it gone. She sat upright. Tomato-pulp streamed down her face.

Fast fingers had stripped off her sandals, leaving her as barefooted as anyone there.

The vendor shook his fist at her, shouting something rude in Hindi.

Katherine sprang to her feet. "My money's gone," she yelled. People milled around, furious eyes staring as if she had no right to be in India.

They'd also taken her satellite phone, the link that could get her out of this.

Katherine glared at the vendor, wondering if he pushed her, and then her foot slipped on a squashed banana. She landed on her butt in a cardboard box full of ripe melons.

The mob closed around and looked like they wanted to lynch her. Rudyard, the rotten kid, had left her abandoned, up shit creek.

Katherine stood, stamped through mashed vegetables and fruit, stubbing a toe on a pineapple.

She ran. Angry cries followed her as she barged through the crowd. In the clear, panting, she ducked into an alley, legs scratched, skirt torn, blouse sodden with tomato gunk, sticky lumps in her hair that must be chewing gum. She snatched the pins out of her hair, letting it fall below her shoulders. Then she stooped and shook her hair. A mushroom fell out, and she had some dates and a squashed fig tangled in there. Grimacing, she plucked out sticky goo.

A man hobbled past. A woman in a sari scurried by carrying a bucket of water. But they didn't take any notice; she must look as grubby as them.

Her feet were sore. She had a bloody scratch on the left one.

Rain poured down, multiplying her aggravation a billion fold. She couldn't have gotten wetter if she stood under the hotel shower and had it going full blast. Her eyes stung as perspiration washed down her brow. She wished she were many miles away from New Delhi, back in the civilized world, San Jose, California.

She'd landed in a mess, and had suffered a stronger dose of culture shock than she could have imagined. Rudyard had gotten her as lost as a blind tourist would be in this hellhole.

The locals were sheltering from the rain now and didn't look like harassing her. She glanced along the alley, hoping to see a doorway, any kind of hideaway. If she could have found a cardboard box nearby, she would have crawled inside. Oh ... if she could only sink into the soft driver's seat of her BMW and race away from there.

Water coursed down her neck, her wet skirt stuck to her legs. She didn't have a dry stitch of clothes on her. It had turned so dark in the alley she couldn't have seen her hand if she held it in front of her nose, and the rain pelted down so hard it seemed to penetrate her skin. She shivered as raindrops bounced off the ground spattering her with mud. Stopping and trying to rekindle her confidence hadn't worked. It had dragged her under even more.

The Hindu god above turned off the faucet. The alley became a steam bath. A light flicked on, shining from a hole in a wall, lancing through the humidity. People appeared as if from nowhere.

She stared at it and shuddered. Hundreds of moths fluttered in the air, flicked in and out of the shaft of light. She buried her face in her hands. Her teeth clacked, her entire body quivered. Not only the moths, everything seemed terrifying. She had never been this frightened before.

Katherine passed several doors as she wandered from one alleyway to another, but the doors were flush with the walls and didn't offer any shelter. The light in the alley dimmed even more as evening set in, and all but a few locals fled to their homes. Evil spirits surfaced as the day wore on, it appeared.

She ought to find a phone and ask the operator for help. Yet, if there were phones in this forsaken hole, they'd be archaic, hand-crank and behind thick walls.

Delirious, she blocked the path of a one-legged beggar, asking, "Can I borrow your cell phone?" He shot around her faster than a frightened kangaroo, bounding down the alley on crutches. Poor man, he must think he'd met a demon.

Crutches, they were forked sticks with rags wrapped around as crude padding for armpits.

Katherine stumbled into a recessed doorway, glad to find a resting place at last. She sat with her back to a lattice door, slumping forward, head on her knees, grimy face between them.

Rudyard must have faked his car breaking down. He'd led her to some people who'd robbed her. But you wouldn't have seen the real New Delhi if he hadn't, a little voice whispered inside her.

She heard scuffling and panting. A rat shot by the doorway, a pack of shadowy dogs in hot pursuit. A small muddy dog appeared, growling. It extended its pointed nose, sniffed at her, wild yellow eyes glinting. "Go away," she shouted at the sniffer. It darted after the pack.

Katherine stared into gloomy darkness. Her heartbeat slowed, she did calm down a bit. Lost in the real Delhi, she saw life from the poverty side for the first time.

Back in America, she'd had everything she needed from the moment the doctor patted her behind and she first opened her mouth and cried. She'd had ninety percent of the pie at birth, whereas the people here had but the thinnest slice and struggled to survive.

Katherine heard another scuffling sound. Her nerves screwed tighter. A tiny, bent figure in a black cloak peered at her. She shrank back against the wooden door.

"I am Elena," a woman said in a voice that sounded like tinkling bells.

Katherine gulped. The devil must have sent this wrinkled apparition to torment her. No, the rain had waterlogged her brain. The old woman staring at her looked genuine, not a dark angel.

Elena aimed a bony finger at her. "Follow me, my child. I will take you to the Sacred Heart."

"Are you the ghost of Mother Teresa?"

Elena laughed, jingled. "No, my child, I am a humble servant of New Delhi."

Katherine hobbled behind the tiny nun, who crabbed along. Oil lanterns lit the alley they now walked down, throwing wavering shadows. Turbaned men and sari-swathed women bowed when Elena passed by.

What a difference, the people were friendly. Not just with Elena, they even shot a few kindly looks at her.

Katherine glanced down, catching a glimpse of the ragged hem of her skirt and her feet squelching through the alley's mud. Strange, but her bedraggled condition didn't bother her any longer. The torrential rain and meeting this wonderful nun had washed away the panic that had come close to throttling her. Filthy, and in good company, she more than blended in and the locals were accepting her as one of them.

Elena wove through a maze of alleys, stopping at a door, next to a hole in the wall where blinding light shafted out. Following the nun, Katherine limped into a stone-walled room, naked light bulbs overhead.

On either side were two long rows of iron-framed beds, people lying on sheet-covered mattresses, nuns ministering to bandaged heads, bleeding arms and splinted legs. Some patients had no visible injuries. Coughing, they appeared to have bad colds or flu.

The odor of disinfectant hung in the humid air. A man nearby groaned while holding his deformed hands to his face, hands with the stubs of leprosy instead of fingers. A woman near the door retched and vomited, and Katherine could also hear someone groaning in a toilet, in considerable distress.

She winced. Life in America had never exposed her to so many germs. But these people didn't have a choice; they lived in an environment where diseases like TB, cholera and dysentery flourished.

A big nun bending over a bed in front of Elena straightened up. Red hair peeped from under the hood of her habit. She glanced at Katherine and said, "Blimey, Elena's dragged in a trampled tourist."

"You must excuse Sister Josephine, she's a cockney," Elena piped in her musical voice. "And you are?"

"Oh, I'm Katherine Mitchell."

Sister Josephine beamed, shaking Katherine's hand. "Call me Josie."

"I'm an American, here on business. I'm staying at the Maharanee Hotel. I got lost."

"Looks as if someone bashed you up, luvy. Come on, we'll get busy on you. There's a spare bed at the end of the ward."

Elena had disappeared. "Where's she gone? I didn't get a chance to thank her."

"Doing her rounds, she's our Pied Piper. Got a nose for blood she has."

Katherine sat on the bed. "Rana," Josie shouted, "bring a sari over here."

A young woman with beautiful eyes ran to Katherine clutching a white garment. Rana screened her with the sari as she stripped off her clothes and wiped herself down with a warm, wet cloth.

Josie massaged ointment into Katherine's feet, and slid them into soft slippers. Rana washed Katherine's hair, flushing out the stickiness.

Katherine soaked up the attention as Rana combed her hair. Humbled, she had changed in more than appearance, no longer had the desire to rise to the top of the company she worked for, had no need to grab the last ten percent of the pie. Their computer products and soaring sales seemed artificial, so unimportant now.

When Rana finished combing, she dabbed scented oil on Katherine's chin, where it felt sore. The Sacred team didn't ignore a blemish on her skin.

Josie fastened the sari around her.

Katherine smiled. She had always wanted a sari and now she had a special one, a lifesaver. When she returned to civilization, she would pay them for their tender loving care a thousand times over.

She glanced from one patient to another, stopping when she saw the finger-stubs on the leper's hands. What the nuns were doing had so much meaning. They were saving human beings, preserving life.

Elena, Josie and Rana are doing something you've never had the courage to begin, the little voice inside her said.

When a monstrous Tsunami hit Sumatra, she'd gasped with admiration as she saw footage of an American woman there, comforting the poor. She could have joined the Red Cross and gone, but didn't dare to jeopardize her 'precious' job.

You're here now, in the thick of poverty, she reminded herself. This is your chance to change.

"Elena will take you back to your hotel when it gets light, luvy."

"I'm in no hurry to leave." A short while ago, she would have sprinted from a place like this.

Josie chuckled. "If you hang around, someone will hand you a bucket and mop."

"I'd love to scrub the floor. Where's the bucket and mop?"

"Oh, I'll also need a scrubbing brush."

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