

## Chapter 6: Ten Thousand Souls in India

*The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove  
than the hunger for bread.*

– Saint Teresa of Kolkata, M.C. (Mother Teresa)

Mrs. Fisher had laughed out loud. “What do you think I am, a baby factory?” she snorted. “Do you have any idea how hard it is to work while you’re pregnant?”

Kayla had fidgeted with embarrassment. She hadn’t really thought about it. She stared at the laces of her shoes, saying nothing.

“Morning sickness? Swollen breasts? Swollen ankles? Not to mention the *pain of childbirth?*” Mrs. Fisher nailed Kayla with her best courtroom voice, as if Kayla were a hardened criminal under cross-examination.

Kayla felt ashamed, even guilty. Did her mother regret having her? Was the pain of childbirth and the cost of raising a child too high a price to pay? She wanted to know the answers to those questions, but she was afraid to ask.

“It ruins your figure—you’re never the same,” she complained. “And then they keep you up all night feeding and changing them. You won’t get a full night’s sleep for the next twenty years!”

“But Mom, you’re not fat!” Kayla said honestly.

Mrs. Fisher smiled half-heartedly. Then, seeing her daughter’s crestfallen face, she quickly squeezed Kayla’s hand after they pulled into the driveway.

Kayla hoped with all her heart that her mother didn’t regret having her. But Kayla knew one thing. She wasn’t anything like her mother. She wanted to have children.

Kayla grabbed a bag of groceries to carry in while her mother unlocked the front door. Setting them on the kitchen counter, she was headed towards her room when Char stopped her and held out a piece of paper.

“Here.” Extending her hand, Char held out a folded piece of notebook paper by the very edges, as if it were something filthy and disgusting that she didn’t want to touch.

“What’s that?” Kayla asked suspiciously.

“Eric said to give it to you,” she replied coldly.

“Eric?! What were you doing talking to *Eric?*” Kayla snapped and snatched the note out of Char’s fingers, hot with jealousy.

“Nothing! I mean, we weren’t, like, you know, *talking*. He just gave it to me and said ‘Could you give this to Mikayla?’ Don’t have a cow.”

“Char? Can you *please* get the rest of these groceries?” Mrs. Fisher asked, ignoring the drama.

“Mikayla?” Kayla smiled dreamily. “Does he always call me Mikayla?” Lost in dreams of romance, Kayla didn’t notice the look of repressed rage on Char’s face as she whirled around and ran to her room to read the precious missive. Char just stared after her with look of pure loathing.

“What a baby. You are such a baby!” Char shouted after her.

“Char! The groceries!”

“Okay! I’m going!” Char yelled, letting the front door slam on her way out to the car.

But Kayla didn’t hear. She was too busy reading Eric’s note of apology, complete with a little drawing of a stick-figure boy giving flowers to a little stick-figure girl.

\* \* \*

*Saturday, October 30, 1999*

*Halloween Eve! I am writing this on the airplane! There are like a hundred people on this plane. I can’t believe there’s so many people going to Cleveland.*

*Everything looks so tiny from up here! We won’t get to our hotel until this afternoon. First we have to fly to Salt Lake City, which is NOT in the direction of Ohio. Then we have to fly east to Minneapolis, which is in Minnesota. Daddy said Minneapolis is named after Minnie Mouse, but I knew he was only kidding. But dumb Kayla believed him! Ha ha!!! What a dork.*

*Mom said we can go shopping tomorrow and if we’re good, she’ll take us to see a movie at the Great Lakes Science Center Omnimax Theater, where the screen is all around you, 360 degrees!*

*We’re so high up in the sky! If this plane crashed we’d all be dead just like that.*

*Sometimes I wonder what happens to people when they die. I believe in life after death, but what’s it like? Do we float around on the clouds like angels? Or do we stay here on earth, like Halloween ghosts?*

Char paused in her writing and looked out at the clouds, but she knew there weren’t any angels out there. She wasn’t so sure about the ghosts. Especially on Halloween night.

*I don’t think anybody really knows for sure. It’s not something you can talk to people about. If you talk about death, they think you’re weird. When I think about dying, I feel afraid. Maybe that’s why nobody wants to talk about it. Because they’re scared, too.*

Tired of writing, Char shoved her journal into her book bag under the seat in front of her. She and Kayla shared one row of seats, their mother wedged strategically between them to keep them from arguing. Their father had taken the aisle seat directly to the right of them in the opposite row and was reading the paper. Kayla and Mrs. Fisher were both listening to music on their Sony Walkmans and paid no attention to Char. The flight attendant was carefully making her way down the aisle with her cart full of drinks and snacks.

Bored, Char peered across the aisle over her father’s shoulder at the newspaper he was reading as their plane sped smoothly through the air.

## ***Weather Watcher***

### **Supercyclone Hits Eastern India, Thousands Dead**

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A supercyclone with winds in excess of 160 mph swept in from the Bay of Bengal to hit the eastern state of Orissa on Friday. This was the second tropical system to affect the region this month.

Up to 15 million people have been left homeless by the storm, with the death toll estimated as high as 10,000. Phone lines and power supplies throughout the state of Orissa were also wiped out. Media reports have compared this cyclone to a 1997 tidal surge which killed thousands in neighboring Andhra Pradesh, and claim this is the worst cyclone to have hit the Indian Bay of Bengal region in three decades.

For a long time, Char stared out the tiny oval window into the peaceful white clouds passing harmlessly beneath them. Then she leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and wondered what it would be like in Cleveland.

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