

DANCING WITH DESTINY

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Mahi thought she would make Anna suffer. She would reveal Raj's secret and then both of them could suffer together!

Raj was on his way back home and he couldn't stop thinking about Anna. Soon Anna would know and everything would be a mess. All the fuss and stress and unwanted sadness, would follow and Raj didn't want it! Mahi might manipulate everything and make Anna feel worse, Raj thought. All of a sudden he felt he should tell her the truth now in light of what's happened; at least it would be a clean version and not some manipulated story. He decided to drop by his house and put away the reports he had just collected and then go to Anna's house. This would be a long and hard day, he thought. As he got closer to home he spotted Jai's car parked in front. Good, maybe he could take Jai for support. He parked the car and went inside heading for his room. He heard voices coming out, they were arguing.

"Why did you look at that?" Jai sounded annoyed. "It was just lying here" Anna replied barely audible. Raj's heart stopped. Anna was in his room. He hadn't cleaned his room up and he had left some more reports lying around on his bed that morning. He walked in and both of his friends stared at him. All three of them stood motionless and quiet. Raj saw his reports lying on his bed, opened and clearly looked through. His heart dropped. He looked back at Anna and she had tears in her eyes, they were threatening to fall down her cheeks. His heart broke and he cursed himself for all the pain he had inflicted on her. At that moment he wished he never knew her.

Anna couldn't believe what she had seen! Reports explaining the lack of treatment options for a certain cancer were the first ones Anna had seen. She had kept looking and found many other papers that had traumatised her. Spinal chord cancer, with a very low prognosis apparently, was mentioned many times. She felt as if her worst nightmares had come to life, she wanted to wake up!

Jai didn't know what to do; he hadn't expected any of this and was worried about Anna's reaction. Without any notice Anna got up and ran to Raj, hugging him tightly – She then burst into tears, like neither of them had ever seen. It was hard for both the men to stand there and watch her wail in such pain. Raj hugged Anna back, he knew she needed to feel him near her – tears also started spilling from his eyes but he tried hard to hold it back.

After what seemed like a lifetime, Anna pulled away slightly.

"Raj, tell me the truth now" She sobbed. "I will tell you, but first please calm down. "Raj, I can't calm down – This is killing me, you know that right?"

He laughed slightly at the irony. "I know

just how much this is killing all of us"

"How can you laugh?" She was being very serious.

"Sit down Anna, let me tell you what's going on"

"You have no choice; I know half of it already!"

"Trust me, that's only a fraction of it" "So tell me!"

"About a year ago, I started getting nauseous and dizzy. I thought I was just overworking and ignored it for awhile. It became worse. My father decided I had to go to the doctor. We went together and got some tests done and the doctor ordered a CT scan as well." "Does your mum know about this?"

"No, she doesn't. I didn't tell her. She didn't like hearing about dad since the divorce. I didn't tell her anything in my life either, because all of it tied back to dad and it would have hurt her."

"So what happened?"

"Well, one day – before my test results came back, dad told me he was having heart problems and that he went to see the doctor about them without telling me. I was obviously upset that he kept me in the dark, but now I understand how he must have felt."

"I'm so sorry Raj!" Anna said feeling sad for him. Jai remained silent, knowing what was coming next.

"Well, he made a request. He asked if I would agree to marry the girl he chose for me, before he passed away – I was shocked that he asked this, I didn't know what to do. Here I was in love with....." Raj stopped.

"Keep going" Anna insisted. "I was in love, with you" Raj winced, and looked at Jai. Jai remained emotionless. "Me? All this time? Are you serious?"

"Well, it was hard for me to agree to his request. But he said it would be his dying wish to me married. I reluctantly agreed to see him happy."

"He introduced you to Mahi?" Anna asked "No, I had known Mahi for a while. She was my dance partner. I thought we were acquaintances – but she had other intentions"

Anna was shocked by this. Dance partner?

"You danced with her?" Anna asked feeling a tinge of jealousy.

"We won that competition together, the one I told you about"

"You never told me about MAHI" Anna erupted angrily.

"She wasn't important to me Anna" Raj said silently. "After dance practice, she

They travelled great distances to be together, broke through barriers to love one another but will destiny force them apart?

was just irrelevant"

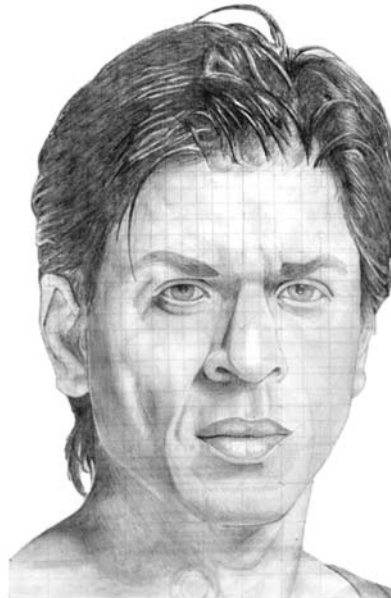
"Keep going" Anna said still feeling a little jealous. Raj felt this as well as Jai. "That day dad took me to Mahi's house. I had no idea she lived there! I was shocked to see her walking out of the room" Raj stopped.

"So then?"

Flashback

Raj watched as Mahi walked out of the room, he noticed the shock on her face too. He wanted to get away, but he had promised his father.

He politely sat through the entire meeting and



had gotten the impression that Mahi was very happy about the union. He however was finding it difficult to trick his heart. That night he tried to tell his father that there was someone else.

"Papa, What if I didn't marry Mahi?"

"I would be upset beta"

"But what if I was in love with someone else?"

"There's really no one more suited for you than Mahi. I thought you would be happy, you two made such a great dance couple"

"Yes, but I don't know if I love her"

"The love will grow as you spend time with her, Raj I'm tired – I need to go to bed."

That was the end of that conversation. Raj didn't try again, he didn't want to strain his father out. He tried to talk to Mahi about the issue directly and see if she could or would end it from her side. They often went to visit Mahi's family before the wedding preparations began, and Raj was trying to find the best time to let Mahi know he didn't want to marry her.

"Mahi I need to talk to you" Raj said spotting Mahi alone in the corridor one afternoon.

"Sure"

"Are you Happy?"

"Sure Raj, I can't believe we're going to get

A novel

By
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married!"

"I don't feel that way about you and thought you should know – it's not fair for you to marry someone who doesn't love you" He had said it straightforwardly. He knew she would be upset but he had to stay true to himself.

"I love you Raj and You can learn to love me" She sounded a bit harsh as she said it. "What if I can't learn?"

"You have to! We're getting married and that's that!" She stormed off toward the living room, leaving Raj dumbfounded.

He had tried everything to get out of the marriage. His mother didn't know about any of it. He didn't even know how to start telling her the entire story. He put it off and thought, she will accept his marriage if it came down to it.

Raj experienced more frequent dizzy spells and felt more and more tired. He wondered when he would get his results. His father wanted the Marriage to go ahead as soon as possible – so everything was planned and ordered quickly. Raj felt hopeless and totally powerless, as he watched everything coming together. A week before the marriage Raj approached Mahi again.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" "Raj what's wrong with you, of course I want to!"

"But what if I'm not happy?"

"What if I am happy? Raj – can't you see how happy I am"

"But I will never be happy with marrying you"

"Learn how to be happy!"

"I can't! I don't want to do this Mahi!"

"Raj, I want to – so deal with it somehow. Your father adores me and he wants you to marry me. You wouldn't disappoint him right?"

Raj wasn't winning this battle. She seemed a little irrational and he gave up. He would force himself to be happy if it would make his father happy. His parents had given him a great life, regardless of marital problems and he owed it to them. His mother would also be happy he had married a girl from a good family; he was so sure of it. But his heart would always belong to Anna and he couldn't do anything about it.

Early on the morning of the wedding, Raj received a call.

"Hello?"

"Raj, Its Dr Rai – I have your test results"

"Oh! Ok I'll come and get them in a couple of days"

"No, Raj you have to come and see me now – it's urgent"

"I'm getting Married today Doctor"

"You might want to come and see me first Raj, I highly advise you come now"

"Okay I will" Raj put down the phone and got dressed. He would make a quick visit to the doctor and then go to Mahi's house where the last minute preparations were being made. They had booked a hall for the wedding and everything was ready.

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