

DANCING WITH DESTINY

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Raj sat down in the air-conditioned doctor's office. He felt a little nervous. He purposely didn't tell his father, he didn't want to trouble him now – not today.

"Raj I received the results last week, but I sent them back again to be re-tested – I had to be sure. But then I got the images from the CT scan and it was obvious to me"

"What is it?" He was curious but wasn't worried. How bad could it be?

"Raj you have a spinal cord cancer – a lymphoma of the spinal cord."

"I have cancer?" Raj was so shocked by this that he felt dizzy.

"Yes – it's in its advanced stages too"

"How? What – How did I get it?" Raj asked the question but couldn't keep his mind in one spot to hear the answer properly. He was devastated. The next thing he heard shattered his world into pieces.

"The prognosis is bad Raj." His doctor said seriously.

"How long? Can it be treated?"

"It's progressed so far that treatment might be useless but I will get you onto corticosteroids as soon as possible – how long, well I can't say exactly. If treatment works out you could live as long as four to five years, if not then maximum a year and a half or two years."

Raj was lost again in his little world. The words four to five years and a year and a half ran through his head. Neither seemed like a long time. How could he tell his parents? How could he get married like this? Knowing he would live only for a short time. He didn't Love Mahi, but he wanted her to have a good life, married to someone who will get old with her. How could he tell his father?

Raj left the doctors office, feeling so low that he could barely walk. The doctor had offered to call him a taxi, because it might be too dangerous for him to drive in this condition, but Raj had declined the offer. He needed to be alone. He thought for a long time, and finally decided how he would go about everything.

A few hours later he walked out of his house carrying most of his belongings. He got into his car and drove away. He would resign from his job and find work as far from there as possible.

Back at Mahi's house, the preparations were going well. She was getting ready and was excited to be with Raj. He may not want her now, but she was hoping that after their wedding he could learn to love her. She smiled to herself as she admired her bridal jewellery. The phone started ringing, she ignored it. Someone downstairs would pick it up, she thought.

Moments later her mother was calling.

"Mahi! Mahi!"

She quickly ran downstairs to see what was going on

"Mahi, its Raj's father on the phone. He says Raj is not at home"

"Of course not, he's probably getting ready somewhere" She replied casually

"No his belongings are all gone"

"What? Oh don't worry Maa he probably packed for the honeymoon!"

"His father doesn't think so, he says Raj has run away"

"I don't think so, he will be here!" She sounded a bit desperate and panic stricken.

"Mahi, darling – I think he's gone" her mother said feeling hopeless.

"No Maa! NO!" Mahi said and ran upstairs.

Raj's father put down the phone with Mahi's mother. He didn't know why his son has caused him such dishonour. His chest started hurting a bit. He rubbed it as he got up and walked toward his room. He fell asleep feeling disappointed. A few hours later his mobile started ringing.

"Hello"

"It's me"

He put down the phone on Raj. He didn't want to talk to his son. The phone rang again soon after.

"Don't call me again!"

"Papa, listen to me! It's important"

"Raj, you have shamed me – I can't face anyone anymore"

"I have my reasons"

"What reasons? Go on explain to me why you have destroyed my name"

"I couldn't marry her papa, she would have been a lone anyway"

"What does that mean?"

"My test results came back – The doctor, well he said..." Raj sighed. He didn't know how to tell his father.

"What is it Raj?" his father was worried now. Raj didn't sound like himself.

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

"I'm a little sick" This was the best he could do; he didn't want his father to get a shock.

"What? What sickness Raj – tell me!"

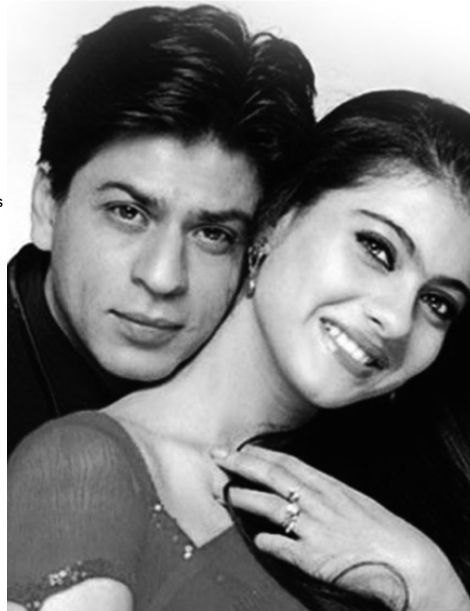
Raj couldn't tell him, he would get sick if he heard.

"I'm sorry dad, I'm sick and I can't get married – I love you" Raj put down the phone.

"Oh god Raj – he didn't know?" Anna asked, tears pouring down her cheeks.

"He didn't know" Raj said silently.

"So is that why your dad..."



"I got a call from our doctor, that he had suffered a heart attack the following day" Tears now rolled down Raj's cheeks as he tried to control himself. "I killed him"

Anna hugged Raj and comforted him. She didn't know what to say, she was trying to be strong for him. The truth was her insides were on fire and she felt sick. One to two years, kept repeating in her mind.

"Raj?" Anna said pulling away a little.

"Hmmm?"

"That important appointment, what was that?"

"My newest test results Anna" He said barely audible.

"Oh" She didn't want to know anymore, she felt dizzy and was only staying strong for him.

For the first time during the entire conversation, Jai spoke up – his voice weak and broken.

"The results weren't good, were they?"

They both looked at him; he looked like he had seen a ghost. Jai had tried to keep it together through all of this, but Raj was his best friend and it was hard for him to hear all

A novel

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this and remain calm.

"Jai, they weren't good"

"Raj we're here for you"

"Anna, my mother doesn't even know about this, I don't know what to do" he said pulling away from her hug.

"We'll tell her together"

"No! I can't tell her!"

"Raj! She has a right to know"

Again Jai remained quiet.
"How do I tell her something like that?"

"We have to have do it somehow"

"So how long do you have Raj?" Jai jumped in, to everyone's surprise.

"Jai!" Anna snapped.

"According to the most recent reports, I have less than 4 months" Anna burst into tears again and ran out of the room. She couldn't take it anymore. She would have to live without him forever and her heart couldn't handle it anymore. She cried until her entire body hurt. She wanted to feel the pain, to be engulfed by it.

Raj and Jai came after her, and found her outside leaning against a tree crying.

"Anna – stop crying, please" Raj pleaded.

"I can't live without you" She said as she hugged him again.

Jai backed away a little feeling like he was intruding. Anna caught his hand and held on tightly. She needed both of them to be close to her, or she wouldn't get through this. After a little while Anna calmed down, but the horrible sickly feeling didn't leave her.

"We have to tell your mum tonight"

"Anna I can't!" Raj said frustrated.

"You can! And you have to!"

"Anna, she will die"

"So you think it's better that one day when you leave her, she get shocked then? And she wouldn't even have you to comfort her" Anna said crying.

"She's right Raj, do it while you're here and we're here" Jai said patting Raj on the back. Raj sighed and agreed. That night he would tell his mother, when she returned from work. The three friends spent the rest of the day together, in Raj's room sitting and talking. It was nice to be together, and they felt their time was precious and limited. Jai noticed how attached Anna was to Raj and his heart broke, but he didn't want to see Anna suffer. He promised himself, that he would make her happy no matter what.

Sometime later Raj's mother arrived home.

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