



DANCING WITH DESTINY

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She sat with him for hours, stroking his hair. She didn't want to waste a single minute of this.

Jai arrived a couple of hours later, puffed out. He had been running.

"I parked so far away, couldn't find parking here – So I ran" he said bent over puffing. He then noticed Raj and straightened up, walking to the bed opposite Anna. He sat down on that side and remained silent.

"Guys, It'll be okay" Raj said barely audible. "You know, this is what I want" "What?" Jai asked curiously

"I'm dying, I know I am – But I'm dying not because I'm sick, but because I took a knife for Anna, I couldn't be happier than this."

They both looked at him shocked. "You're dying because of me Raj" Anna said silently. "No darling, I was dying anyway – now I get to die for a cause" He said smiling weakly.

Anna cried into his blankets, shaking through her tears.

"Raj, I want you to do something – I know you would do it any other time – and I know she would want you to" "What?" Anna's heart sank as Raj posed the question, he sounded so weak.

Jai pulled out a small pot of something. He opened it to reveal Sindoor as red as the blood Anna had seen on Raj – her heart skipped a beat, some of it blew out in the wind from the air conditioner. He quickly closed it and looked at the both of them.

"You know what I'm asking now"

"Jai I can't"

"Anna, do you want him to?"

"Yes" She sobbed and started crying into her hands. She wanted it more than anything.

"Raj I know you're too noble to marry me and leave me – but make me happy one more time"

"Do it Raj"

"But Jai..." Raj started coughing; he coughed until he was out of breath.

"You..."

"I'll look after her Raj – I know how much you love her too" Jai said silently. He then opened the pot and held it out to Raj. He took some of the red powder between two fingers and looked at it, rubbing it in-between his fingers.

"I can't, I love her, how can I do that and leave"

"Raj, remember My last two IOU's?" Anna said remembering the pieces of paper from a life time ago. "I'm using both of them now" She smiled painfully. "This wish is definitely worth two – please Raj, do it"

Raj laughed and starting coughing in pain.

Those stupid papers, from a happier lifetime, he had give her his word and couldn't go back on it.

"Anna, I love you" He said a tear falling down his cheek. She couldn't bear looking at him, she couldn't even stop crying. But she went closer to him ready for him to take her. He slowly lifted himself up and smeared the sindoor between the parting of her hair, he kissed her forehead and lay back. "Now you have no more IOU's" He said smiling.

"I don't need any more" Anna sobbed.

Jai smiled to himself, this is what he wanted – for them to be tied together somehow. He knew Anna wanted it as well as Raj – but Raj would never have taken initiative. Who would do that and then leave their wife? Raj's feelings were fair, but Jai knew Raj trusted him to take care of Anna. And he would, with his whole life.

"Jai, thank you" Raj stuttered. "I'm tired guys" He said coughing.

Anna stroked his hair again. "Go to sleep my darling – we'll be here" She knew it would be the end. "I love you, we love you" She said tears falling down her cheeks, but she felt in control now. She would be strong somehow, for him.

She held his hand until he drifted off, and one straight heart breaking line appeared on his monitor. She lost all strength and collapsed into a crying fit. She could barely breathe, but felt strong hands holding her from behind – moving her outside the room as staff rushed in.

They were outside the room and Anna could barely breathe through her tears. Jai sat with her holding her. The doctor came out of Raj's room.

"Time of death, 5.55pm" He said and left. "Jai, what about Aunty?" Anna said through a new stream of tears.

"I told her before I came, she will be on her way too, probably almost here" He said and sighed. He hugged Anna close and let her cry. He wanted to cry – but didn't want to scare Anna. The vermilion on her hair was rubbing off on his chest, as red and raw as her pain.

They returned back home with Raj's body. Anna told Jai the entire story about Mahesh and together they reported it to the police. Mahi was nowhere to be found, but the police soon caught Mahesh. He denied Mahi's involvement and she was free, he went to prison for Raj's murder.

Jai held Anna's hand as they descended down the stairs into the ball room. They were attending the annual ball Anna had always wanted to go to. This time they were doing it as husband and wife newly married just a week ago.

They went to the table their ticket indicated, a small table for two, just perfect. Both

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

sat down and watched the others dancing. Anna's heart panged as she saw the familiar dance steps that she and Raj had practised a little more than a year before. Jai squeezed her hand, he always knew when she was hurting and he was always great about it, supporting her whenever he could.

"Do you want a drink?"

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"Yes please Jai" Anna replied. He got up and went, disappearing into the crowd. Anna's eye caught someone familiar. She got up and walked toward the woman, it was Mahi. She was smoking out in the balcony, in the opposite direction Jai has gone. Anna grabbed her shoulder and turned her around.



"What the – oh Anna" Mahi smiled icily. "How are you?"

"I'm just fine thanks!"

"Great to hear, I see you're not here with Raj"

"Duh!"

"awww so sad, what happened to him?"

"I think you know!" Anna said flaring up. She wanted to punch Mahi in the face.

"Oh yea! My brother killed him didn't he" Mahi said without any emotion. "I won didn't I?"

"How did you win?" Anna snapped.

"Oho! I separated you quickly, like I said I would"

"You lost Mahi!"

"I did what I wanted to do" She said a little hesitantly, wondering what Mahi was talking about. She tried to sound confident in her response but failed.

"But you lost – he was going to die anyway Mahi – he only had 3 or 4 months left" "I got the job done quicker" She said visibly getting angry. Anna's heart burnt with Pain, hearing about Raj's death as a "job".

"Actually, you did him a favour"

"What?" Mahi was caught off guard.

"He didn't want to just waste away sick and weak, he wanted to die with cause – and he died saving me" Anna said tears threatening to break free.

"So?"

"Don't you see? You did him a favour and I'm

A novel

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sure he's thankful! By the way he married me before he died, we both got what we wanted" Anna said and turned to walk back to the table – leaving a shocked Mahi standing at the balcony.

Jai walked back a little while later with cool drinks. Anna took a sip and stared at the dance floor. Raj had taught her all these dances, and she wanted to show him how well she had learnt them.

"Jai, let's dance" She suggested.

"Sure" He said surprised. He didn't think she would want to.

They walked into the dance floor, Jai placed his arm around her waist and Anna placed hers on his shoulder. They started gliding

across the floor together. Jai spun Anna around and caught her and held her close.

"I love you Anna"

"I love you too Jai" She meant it. He was everything to her, especially her pillar of strength. She loved him tremendously. They kept dancing.

After awhile of dancing they went back to sit down. She stared at the dance floor once more and she remembered a distant yet pleasant memory. She laughed at how real it had become.

"No Anna will be my wife" Jai had argued as they played House and families together.

"How? I am the oldest and I get Anna" Raj pulled at her arm. Jai joined in and pulled from the other end. It was like tug-a-war and she was trapped in the middle.

"Okay okay, look! I can be both your wife" She said taking her arms out of their clutches.

"How? Jai had asked grumpily "Because I love you both and we can share" Anna had replied stubbornly.

She smiled, knowing she did love them both. She cherished that memory and every other she had, and held them close to her heart, so that Raj would never be missed.

THE END