

THE BLUE SAPPHIRE

THE PAST ALWAYS COMES BACK TO
HAUNT YOU...



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The Blue Sapphire

'All of us live with our past. All of us allow it to shape our future. But some of us know how to shrug the past. I think that is who I am.....'

Rachel D'Souza spoke in a tone that had a lot of confidence, yet a tinge of sadness mixed in her husky voice. Colonel Vikram Singh could feel a surge of attraction pulling himself towards her, and yet a strange unknown force repelling him from going near. It was a strange contradiction of thoughts and feelings juxtaposed against each other.

'Is it so easy Ma'am? To erase the past and move ahead?' There was a feeling of hurt in his voice. She chose to ignore that.

'Colonel Singh, would you like to have a drink? It's quite cold out here in Shillong.'

Yes, it was a cold wintry night. The snowflakes were falling in a synchronized rhythm. The logs of wood burning in the fireplace kept the drawing room warm. A drink would surely warm up his body and heart. Yet he decided to decline the offer.

'No Ma'am, thank you very much. I do not like hard drinks. But a glass of warm water would definitely help.'

'Just water? I could make you some coffee or maybe a hot chocolate drink?'

'Okay, coffee would be fine. I hope I am not bothering you too much.'

'Not at all. But would you mind if I take some alcoholic drink? I am feeling very uncomfortable with this chill.'

'Not at all Ma'am. Please go ahead.'

Rachel stood up, went to the kitchen and switched on the coffee maker. He took a look around the dimly lit drawing room that was large in size but sparsely decorated. However, the furniture and paintings reflected expensive taste. There was a rifle hanging on the wall with the stuffed head of a deer and the head of a tiger hanging on both sides of the gun. Someone in this house surely loved hunting!!!

Colonel Vikram Singh was on his way to Mawsynram to meet his fiancée Ritika when his car broke down on the Guwahati-Shillong highway. It was 7 o'clock in the evening but it was already pitch dark. The snowfall had made the visibility extremely poor. He could not see any vehicles coming or going

past. There was only a faint light on the top of a hillock. He followed the trace of light and landed in this secluded bungalow in the middle of wilderness.

He rang the door bell. The door was opened by a petite middle aged attractive lady dressed in a silk nightgown. She was holding a solar powered emergency lamp in her hand. People in the North East went to bed early. Perhaps he had wakened her up from sleep. The lady had slim figure, fair skin, curled hair, deep brown eyes and sharp features. She was definitely attractive and good looking. He felt a sense of guilt pervade his heart.

'I am so sorry to have disturbed you. Actually my car broke down. I am an Army man. This is my Id card.' He thrust his identity card into her hand.

She brought the lamp nearer and took a careful look at the card. 'Come in, Colonel Vikram Singh --- we are human beings --- and it is our moral duty to help each other.' She spoke slowly, but there was a touch of mystery in her voice.

That's how the events had unfolded this evening. Now he was sitting in the sofa, sipping hot coffee and stealing uncomfortable glances at the attractive lady in silk gown sitting opposite to him. She was drinking cognac from a flute shaped glass. If she was feeling cold, why was she not wearing a coat? And why drink cognac instead of brandy? Who was she, living all alone in this desolate area on top of the hillock? There were too many questions flooding his mind. He tried hard not to look at the cleavage between her breasts which were barely covered by the black silk nightgown.

'I am sorry Ma'am, but would you mind if I asked you a few questions?'

'I know what you want to ask?' She gulped down the cognac from the glass and refilled it. 'You want to ask who am I? What am I doing in this secluded place? Am I married or not?'

'Not exactly, but' He put down the coffee cup on the table and looked at her eyes. Was there a burning desire in her eyes? Or was he imagining things in this eerie atmosphere?

'My name is Rachel D'Souza. I was a film actress in Mumbai before I gave it all up. That was ten years back. I relocated to Shillong. I live here with my boyfriend Ricky. I am not married.'

Rachel D'Souza? Actress? Although he was a big fan of movies, he had never heard the name before. And what was the name of her boyfriend? Ricky? The name sounded familiar. Where did he hear that name before?

'No Ma'am, the question that I wanted to ask --- Don't you feel afraid --- This lonely place --- all alone?'

'I love solitude. And no, I am not afraid of anything --- because I have this!!!'

She projected her right hand towards him. There was a ring in the middle finger. The blue stone in the middle of the ring was sparkling. 'This is called the blue sapphire. Neelam. This protects me from all danger.'

Neelam!!! The words hit his brain like the flames of an inferno. Neelam. Two dead bodies. Covered in white shroud. A young boy with tears in his eyes. Neelam!!!

'Ma'am, I am from the Army. I know the worst animal in this planet is the human being. Because we are the only species who attack our own kin. I have killed terrorists. I have been shot at several times. I would not have felt safe just because I am wearing a blue sapphire.'

'Colonel, there is another way of killing. Just look at the ceiling above your head.' Rachel took another sip of the cognac, her eyes transfixed on his face.

Colonel Vikram looked up. There was a spider perched up on the ceiling. It was busy spinning a web. Very soon a fly would get trapped in the net.

'The spider is a female. It is waiting patiently to trap the fly into it's net so that it can devour it's prey at leisure.'

'How do you know that the spider is a female?'

'Have you heard of the black widow, Colonel Vikram Singh? The most deadliest of all the spiders. And it is a female!!!'

'So, you know who I am? And you pretended that you didn't know me?' There was a rage burning in his eyes.

'Colonel, in your army you have something called Intelligence. But you forgot that there is something called Counter Intelligence. You have been tracked the moment you got down at Guwahati Airport. You pretended that your car broke down. I pretended that I had never seen you before. And, of course, I am still an actress. My screen name was Neelam Khanna.'

Neelam!!! Two dead bodies!!! Covered in white shroud. A young boy with tears in his eyes. Neelam!!!

The snow was falling heavily. Colonel Singh understood he would get no support or cover from the Army unit amidst this turbulence. He drew out his

service revolver, pointed it straight at her head and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. The cartridge was empty!!!

Rachel let out a shrill laughter that shook the silence of the night. She brought her face close to his ear. He could feel her warm breath on his face.

'I have mixed sedatives in the coffee that you drank right now.' She whispered in his ear. You'll lose your consciousness in the next half an hour!!!'

'You'll not get away with his.' He was very angry. 'The moment the snowfall stops, the army commandos will storm this house and capture you, dead or alive.'

'They won't get me alive. I had mixed potassium cyanide in my cognac. The moment I saw you in the doorstep, I knew my cover was blown. Your Indian Army will get nothing out of me. I will be dead in the next half an hour. They will only get my dead body.'

'You said you do not bother about the past. Before dying --- would you have some remorse in your heart?'

'Vikram, every story has got two sides. But we only hear one side of it and get judgmental about someone. You know I'm a bad woman; I was the one who was responsible for your father's death. But you have never heard my side of the story. There are still a few moments left before I die. Would you let me tell you why and how things happened?'

Colonel Vikram Singh was feeling drowsy. The sedatives had started taking it's effect. He tried hard to retain his composure.

'My father was a decorated Army officer.' He tried to speak in a steady voice. 'We were a small happy happily --- Me, my mom and my dad --- We had all the happiness in this world. Everywhere we went, we could see the love and respect in the eyes of everyone we met. And then you stepped in his life --- and everything was destroyed.'

'I didn't have a choice.' The flames in the fireplace were shimmering. Rachel stood up and threw some pieces of wood into the fireplace. There was a crackling sound and the flames became bright once again.

'I was a small town girl lost in the big city of Mumbai. I desperately needed someone to hold my hand. And then suddenly Ricky happened in my life. He was a fun loving guy. He always made me feel happy. He had contacts in high places. In fact, he was the one who got me the break in movies.'

'Yes. You changed your name to Neelam Khanna. Acted in five movies, All were superhits. And then you did this heinous act.'

'I didn't know that Ricky was an undercover agent of our enemy country. He was getting paid a lot of money for stealing secret documents from the Indian Army. And he effectively used women to get the job done. I was just a pawn in this game.'

'You honey-trapped my dad. There were pictures taken with him in compromising position with you. Ricky tried to blackmail him to get secret documents in exchange for those objectionable pictures. My father was a man of principles. He never relented to those devious tactics. The pictures were leaked to the Army; they picked him up, tortured him and got a confession letter signed by him. He died broken hearted in jail. My mother died of shock at home. I lost the two people I loved most in this world.'

'I am very sorry, Vikram, I never wanted to do this. But one has to repay her debts.' There were tears in her eyes. She picked up a tissue paper to wipe the corner of her eyes.

'Ricky said he wanted a small favour from me. I didn't know the repercussions. I've destroyed your family. But God has also punished me. My career was ruined. I had to flee from Mumbai with Ricky. And we have been living in cover out here in Shillong till then. You don't know what kind of miserable life I had been leading. I loved parties, I loved to mingle with people; and here I was waiting for my doom at the hands of someone who would blow off my cover.'

Colonel Vikram Singh dropped the gun on the table. He grasped the handle of the sofa to keep himself steady. 'I doggedly pursued the case. I proved the innocence of my father in Army court. I joined the Army and became a Colonel. But my mission was always to hunt down you and Ricky --- the people who wrecked and ravaged my happy life.'

'Too late, son. I will be gone in another few minutes. But I'll pray to God to give you his blessings. May you get back all the happiness you lost.' She slumped in the couch, her lifeless body displaying a serene calmness.

There was a shadow silhouetted against the wall in the corner of the room. Colonel Vikram Singh spun around. It was a tall man wearing a Panama hat and a gun in the hand. The gun was pointed straight at him.

'You forgot a small detail, Son; there is another character in this story. Ricky Gonzalez. Yes, that's me. Working under cover for CIA and ISI in India. I'm sorry for your dad. I'm sorry for your Mom. I'm sorry for Rachel. And I'm sorry for you. You also have to die tonight. Because I have to live and carry on with my work.'

'You won't live, you scoundrel.' Colonel Vikram Singh, in a lightning move, picked up the pistol from the table and pulled the trigger. The gun fired with a deafening noise and the bullet drilled a neat hole in Ricky's heart before going out. The tall man fell like a log of wood on the floor, shock and awe written all over his face!!!

'You never knew I always carry an emergency bullet in my pocket. And I am not sorry for you Ricky Gonzalez.' He kicked the dead body of the tall man. 'You died the way you should have died.'

The mission was over. Colonel Vikram Singh looked up at the ceiling. There was a fly which had got entrapped in the spider's net. It would soon devour it's prey.

That's perhaps the way the world works, he wondered. All of us are a part of a food chain. Ricky used Rachel to get to his father and exploit him. He used Rachel to get to Ricky and extract his revenge. But Rachel? The girl who loved partying, the girl who loved fun ---- Did she really deserve the sufferings she had to go through?'

He stood up and planted a kiss on the dead woman's forehead. He ran his hands on her cheeks. The dried up tear drops had made them wet. He gently closed her eyelids.

'The past always catches up with us, Miss, and we all have to pay for our sins. We live for the future; but our lives are always shaped by what we have done in the past.'

The snowfall had stopped. A faint ray of sunlight could be seen in the distant horizon. The New Year had started. And his new life would start soon. He stepped out of the house and started his car. The engine came back to life with a roar. There was another journey to be made. His fiancée Ritika must be waiting eagerly for him.

The End