

Copyrighted Material

KARMA AND OTHER STORIES

Rishi Reddi



An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

KARMA AND OTHER STORIES. Copyright © 2007 by Rishi Reddi. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Elliott Beard

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN-10: 0-06-089878-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-06-089878-6

07 08 09 10 11 ID/RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyrighted Material

THE VALIDITY OF LOVE

My friend Supriya and I had been roommates in the South End for two months when the letter came from her father about arranging her marriage. It was in a simple white business envelope, and because we had known each other since we were six years old, I read it at the same time she did, standing at the kitchen counter, looking over her shoulder. *Women have certain urges*, Gopal Uncle had written. *These are natural and part of life*. We looked at each other and groaned. “I thought *Indian* women didn’t have urges,” Su said stoically. We had just finished college and found jobs, and we felt unbound from our parents, who lived only twelve miles away in Lexington. We had a Ganesha that hung on our threshold, and an ample liquor cabinet to welcome a steady stream of friends that came for late-night parties and weekend brunches or dropped by after work. We had so convinced ourselves that we were free and hip and American that, when the letter arrived, we were immediately suspicious.

It is the correct time that you should be married in accordance with our customs and traditions, the letter continued. *Your mother and myself would like to help you to arrange a good match*. Atticus, my one-hundred-and-fifty-pound rottweiler, nuzzled Su’s leg.

“Help *you* arrange the marriage?” I said. “There’s a new approach. My parents should try that one.”

We read more. *Enclosed you will find a photograph and CV of a suitable boy. Already I met him while in Los Angeles during my conference, as he is enrolled in his final year as a graduate student at California Technology Institute, finishing his dissertation. He is a brilliant fellow, and I would be proud to have him as my son-in-law. He will be in the Boston area in September for a family wedding. It is best that you should meet him then.*

The photo was of Sameer Murthy, a young man of medium complexion, straight nose, nondescript jaw, average eyes, and a mouth.

“*He* would be very proud to have this guy as *his* son-in-law?” Su said.

“Toss it,” I said, with more bravado than I had myself mustered in Su’s place, only two months before. “I’m taking the garbage out tonight.”

But Su’s smooth forehead was furrowed, and she flipped her long black hair over her shoulder. “What makes them change from taking us anywhere we want, buying us anything we want, telling us we’re capable of doing anything in the world—to *this*?” she said, shaking the letter as if she were angry with me.

“Marriage is most important for young girl,” I said in my imitation of a heavy Indian accent, hoping to make her smile. But Su was serious. “Why can’t they see? I’ve told them already. There’re so many things I want to do before I get married.” She sat down with a thud on our kitchen stool. Atticus whined and nuzzled her again.

In college, we had laughed this stuff off and gone to the campus pub for a beer. But now it was getting worse. Our parents were getting more insistent.

I tried again with the accent. “One must marry at correct time. Then eggs are healthy. Children are smart.”

“Scary thing is, they believe that shit.”

“Too much freedom is not good,” I added.

She rolled her eyes. “Duty is beauty, and rights make fights.”

I got a small smile.

“Sex act is sacred for Hindus. For vulgar Amrikans, if skin touches skin, it means nothing.”

“Would you stop?” she said, but she was grinning finally, and flung the letter on the table between the doors to our two bedrooms, where Sameer Murthy’s average eyes watched us as we walked by that evening, wearing our Victoria’s Secret bras and low-rise panties. I was surprised to find it still lying there the next day.