

# Wine, Wine Everywhere

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It is funny how sometimes your wildest dream suddenly comes true. This happened to me on a gray and frigid Monday morning when I, Jay Kumar, Development Manager at Periscope Inc., was sitting in my Rochester, Minnesota office staring with bleary eyes at my long list of unread email messages. (My name originally was “Vijay Dixit”, but I dropped the last name after several American friends pointed out how horrific it sounded!)

I sat there at my desk staring at the list of emails, while replaying in my mind the Hindi movie I had seen the previous night that had some really steamy sequences of the new Indian actress Ishita! Just then my desk phone rang.

My boss Cartwright wanted me to join a meeting. I dragged myself to a large meeting room which was already filled with several big shots including our CEO Bruce Myers. Apparently the company wanted to set up a development center in India and they wanted me to consider moving there as a

Development Manager! Not just that. The development center was going to be set up in my home town Pune! I felt as if I had hit a double jackpot in the state lottery.

Ok, before I go further, here is a bit of quick background on me.

I had been in the US for almost 12 years by then. I had begun with a couple of years of schooling at the Louisiana State Grad School a.k.a. the *party college*. Oh, those wild parties I had enjoyed there! I still tremble as I recall that spring break evening spent waddling in the Jacuzzi with those lovely blonde girls. But the stupid bimbos only entertained guys with blue eyes! I had to settle for a bony Malayalam girl who had a pretty face but not much else to write home about. And it was so frustrating to extract anything out of her. I often wonder why India exports to the world the best of clothing, spices, and talent, but so few good-looking females!

My college stint at Louisiana State was followed by two jobs in Fortune 1000 companies – the first one lasting 3 years and the second one at Periscope. My first job was actually quite good – interesting work and a pretty receptionist and all that, but the buggers refused to sponsor my green card. So I moved to Periscope and ended up in this hole called Rochester in wintry Minnesota. What does a young man do to entertain himself in a village that has 8 months of snow with the mercury rarely above 0 Celsius!

I had no choice but to take my career seriously, as Dad often advised me to. I had little trouble climbing the corporate ladder of my new employer. I was promoted twice in five years, and became the Development Manager of a team of ten programmers. My team mostly consisted of white American kids who barely appeared of high school age but were incredibly

smart programmers. I got a feeling that they didn't quite relish the idea of having a brown foreigner fellow as their boss, which was apparent by the way they totally ignored me outside the office. If I ever ran into any of them in the mall or the post office the fellow would just walk away staring in space.

But they were all very obliging at the office, and helped me ship great quality products on time every time.

After 6 years of 12-hour work days and zero entertainment except for the latest Indian movies that made it unnecessary to subscribe to adult magazines, I got fed up with Rochester. My parents, who lived in India, had started pestering me to get married. You are pushing thirties and it would get harder later on to find a suitable girl, they said. The thought of spending the rest of my nights with the same woman repulsed me immensely, so I kept my parents at bay.

But it was obvious I wasn't getting anywhere in this country where young women had the right to reject a brown Indian – a right which even the few local Indian women exercised diligently. My office receptionist, the 60-year old Lydia, was the only woman who showed any sort of feminine warmth towards me. She pampered me as if I were her high-school lover. She brought me candies and cookies and greeted me every time I entered or left the office. She had photos on her desk of her pretty daughters, who I discovered were already married!

I also had very few friends in Rochester, and so, I missed dearly my college gang in Pune – most of whom were back home. They sent me regular reports of their exploits in the booming city of Pune. They wrote about the posh multiplexes and malls where all the pretty girls in Pune hung out during evenings and weekends. They sent me pictures of their company

picnics on Konkan<sup>2</sup> and Kerala beaches where they were accompanied by their sexy female colleagues in tight T-shirts and jeans. Clearly my friends were way ahead of me in terms of having fun. I was just working my butt off piling up useless dollars in my bank account, and adding miles on my little Miata sports car without ever getting a girl to hop in the passenger seat. The glamour of living in the US was clearly wearing out on me. That's when thoughts of returning to India started obsessing me. I started praying that my company would start something in India and send me to work there.

The surprise offer (as mentioned above) to do exactly that – move to India and manage a small engineering operation for the company – landed in my plate and I jumped on it readily. I quickly sold off my car and house and took off for India – the land of pretty girls who were looking for young, promising men like me!

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The India Dev Center of Periscope Inc. was to have 25 people initially, out of which 20 were to be engineers, all reporting to me. I was to interview and hire all of these people. I was only to focus on engineering work and someone else was to be the center head taking care of operational matters. This arrangement suited me very well. I did not want to deal with the Indian bureaucracy and get entangled in paperwork.

I quickly appointed a woman named Sheila as the HR Manager, and assigned recruitment as her first task. Sheila was thirty-something, with average looks, and was a divorcee with a 6-year old son. She might have been attractive before marriage but the separation and the single-parenting seemed to have taken their toll.

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<sup>2</sup> Konkan is a coastal region in western India.

Sheila impressed me with her organized and efficient style of working. With her help I immediately arranged to put out feelers in local newspapers and job-sites about the open positions in Periscope. I told Sheila that we should promote *equal opportunity* and try to hire male and female candidates in equal numbers, since that was company policy back in the US. I prepared a written test to filter out the trash, and set up an interview panel of consultants to perform the first round of interview. I decided to do the *final interview* myself one-to-one.

To my dismay, the folks who were passing the first round and being sent to me for the final round were mostly guys. I tried my best to be professional and keep in focus my company's interests when I interviewed these guys. But clearly I had not left my cozy cocoon in Minnesota to supervise a bunch of bespectacled, scraggy village boys and teach them how to ship software products. My dream was to build a team of *beautiful and smart* young college women and train them personally to be top class programmers.

So, I worked things such that, by the end of this hiring round we had assembled a team of 15 programmers out of which 7 were girls. I realized during the hiring process that Periscope wasn't all that hot in the job market in comparison with multinationals like Dell and IBM and Indian behemoths like Wipro and Infosys. The market for IT workers was a seller's market and the workers had a wide variety of choices. But I persuaded my bosses in Minnesota to fork out high salaries to ensure that these 15 people accepted our offer.

Preeti was one of the smarter kids in this lot. She spoke English really well and was originally from Delhi. During the interview she looked straight into my eyes while answering all the questions. She was tall, fair, had lovely dark hair up to her

shoulders and had a figure of a model. I couldn't help but recount the sad old days when Indian girls who looked anything like Preeti would take no notice of me even if I ran around them in circles a hundred times! And now, here I was with an extremely pretty girl sitting just a few feet from me, who was trying to persuade me to recruit her. *I had certainly come a long way.*

Preeti informed me that prior to getting into IT she had tried careers in Hospitality and Airlines but had been appalled by the prevalence of favoritism and exploitation in those industries. She said, "I believe in meritocracy where only *performance* matters". She admitted that it had been a dream for her to work in a software development shop and added that "It would be an honor to learn from someone who had had so much hands-on experience".

She was talking about me all right, but of course I couldn't tell her that I was myself looking for some "hands-on" experience!

I made Preeti a senior programmer although she had only two years of experience. And then there were Archana and Nayana who had both been brought up in rural areas but had done their college education in Pune. They didn't speak English that well, but were technically good, and smiled a lot during the interview, which made it easy for them to win me over.

Overall, I was satisfied with the team we had assembled. They were mostly fresh out of college with little industry experience. They had no clue of how to design and build products. But they had a lot of energy and potential, and showed a great deal of interest in product development.

We organized a formal opening ceremony for the Periscope India Development Center for which my CEO Bruce Myers flew in from Rochester. He gave a pep talk to the team in which he sprinkled a lot of praise for me. I stole glances at the team during his speech and noticed that the girls were glancing at me with eyes full of admiration and respect. *This was such a far cry from the company meetings in Rochester in which I amounted to nothing.*

This meeting in Pune was different. All the beautiful girls Preeti, Archana, Nayana, and others quite evidently admired me and were eagerly looking forward to work for me. They weren't concerned about my skin color or accent. They didn't regard me as short, alien, and unattractive. To them I was a hero – someone who had made it big in the Mecca of the software industry, and had returned to India to help youngsters like them fulfill their dreams.

My self-esteem sky-rocketed after that opening ceremony. I felt like a real man once again! Thereafter I started taking a keener interest in my appearance, the clothes I wore, and even started doing physical exercise daily in the club-house of my apartment complex.

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The first little jolt came when I began a four-week training program for the brand new batch. I noticed that six people were missing – including 2 girls. When I inquired, I came to know that the buggers had gone after better offers from another company. The ungrateful rascals hadn't even bothered to inform me or the HR. I felt let down, humiliated. But I recovered when I saw that Preeti, Archana, and Nayana were all still there sitting in the classroom, and were waiting eagerly with

their big beautiful expectant eyes. I gathered heart and started the training right away.

I had never delivered formal training before, but my English was ok, and more importantly, my confidence was high. I made sure I sprinkled in a lot of American phrases like “*get real*”, “*low hanging fruit*” and “*just kidding*”. I also rolled my eyes a lot and varied the pitch of my voice as if I were singing. I wanted to impress the audience with my authentic American grooming. The guys mostly kept their faces straight and rarely said anything. The girls, I felt, watched me with admiration.

They asked questions like, “Sir, why do you need frequent milestones when you are building a product?”

I hated the “Sir” part because that created a wall between them and me, but it seemed so ingrained in their vernacular that it was impossible to make them call me *Jay*. But I valiantly carried on with answers like, “Excellent question! Guys, Nayana here is really thinking the big picture and not merely concerning herself with coding.”

When I sat in my office reviewing my accomplishments of the first month, things didn’t look all that rosy. The employees had all attended the entire training, and had now started reading documentation and occasionally dipping their fingers in sample code. Preeti and the other girls always looked up and greeted me with “*Good morning Sir*” whenever I passed by their cubicles. If I sidled up closer and enquired about their work or asked what they had had for breakfast, they would give an enchanting smile and say, “*Oh, the usual stuff Sir. How about you?*”

The conversation never went past these niceties. But then it had just been a month. Girls need time to warm up.



I started to have meetings with Sheila once a week to review the HR issues – employee complaints, infrastructure problems, how to best spend the morale budget, soft skills training, and so on. I gave her a lot of ideas based on my US experience and she was quite receptive to my suggestions. Sheila was a cool-headed person, and handled delicate employee situations skillfully. She brought her son to the office occasionally since there was no one to take care of him after school. I allowed him to sit in vacant meeting rooms and draw animals on white-boards.

Sheila often said to me that she was grateful for my understanding and help, and sometimes shared some of her personal stories with me. I usually listened intently and offered her some advice based on my Americanized way of thinking. I often wondered if Sheila had sensed that I gave too much attention to my female employees. But she never showed any hint of that, and instead praised me for my *down-to-earth* management style.

In the meantime, Manish Patel, our center head and my boss, hired a receptionist to attend the phone and receive visitors. Her name was Asmita and she always wore sari to work. She looked young and beautiful, but I found out that she was already married. Bummer! Nevertheless, I chatted with Asmita whenever I got the opportunity.

Asmita was a local resident of Pune, had never left the city, and had no interest whatsoever in other parts of the world. She always had a phone – either her mobile or the office phone – pressed to her ears; God only knew who called her so often. She rarely smiled when she looked up at a visitor, and instead looked with a frown as if the visitor had no business visiting! But I was willing to forgive her for these petty faults because she was attractive and never failed to smile at me.

At home, my parents were initially deeply suspicious of my decision to return to India. But later they relaxed a bit when I told them that it was a short 3-year contract. They now began to actively pester me with marriage proposals. My father even took me aside once and to my astonishment told me that “*A proper Indian girl will eat and drink with you, or even go to movies with you, but she will never sleep with you unless you were her husband*”.

I wondered if he had caught on with my intentions at the office. But I shrugged that suspicion away and told him that I completely agreed with him, but I was rather busy at the office since we were in a *startup* mode.

I also wondered how successful my father had been with girls when he was a young man. Surely there were fewer opportunities in his times. Poor old chap!

In the initial days of my stay in India I used to go home every day to have lunch with my parents, but then I realized that I was wasting a golden opportunity to have lunch with my female employees! So I stopped going home and started eating sandwiches and sizzlers in restaurants nearby our office.

It would have looked odd if I had invited only the girls to lunch, so, I invited the entire team to go with me for lunch. I made the invitation appear spontaneous, so that inevitably some people would drop out because they had brought their lunch boxes. Unfortunately, every time it was the girls who had lunch boxes, so I ended up going with the guys! The conversation with them was always a one-way traffic. I inquired about their home towns, parents, experience in Pune, etc., and they responded mostly with single line answers.

One day, I mustered courage and said to Preeti and the other girls, "Hey ladies, you never come to lunch with me. Tomorrow you are not going to bring your lunch boxes. Your cooks, whoever they are, will get the day off."

To my relief they all laughed and said, "Sure Sir, we would love to have lunch with you".

The lunch was great. The girls were a lot more cheerful than the guys and responded to all my questions with elaborate answers. I even subtly encouraged them to ask me personal questions. They appeared to be surprised when they learnt that I was still single.

"I don't want to rush into marriage. It is important to have fun. After all you get only one life!" I confided with them.

They just gave me wide toothy smiles and continued munching on their food.

The lunches became more frequent, and on several occasions I managed to have just the girls to go with me. That allowed me greater freedom to speak my mind and try to reduce the distance between us.

"You know, you should really stop calling me *Sir*" I said to them, "I am not much older than you are".

"Yes Sir, but it is an Indian custom which is so difficult to throw away", they said every time.

"You know, in the US, organizations don't have any hierarchy. We should have the same thing here. We are all colleagues, there is no boss." I said hoping to make them feel closer to me.

The girls just smiled at such comments.

“You know, you should let me know if you have any problems at all. Not just technical and work-related, but even something like needing a ride home”. I was clearly pushing my luck.

The girls smiled innocently at such suggestions and said something like, “Oh Sir. That is so nice of you to offer. Bosses are rarely so helpful like you are”.

I hated that they were still calling me “*Sir*”, but at least now they knew I was available in case they were interested in some adventure.

Since Sheila had no one at home to have lunch with, she occasionally joined me for lunch. After a while I got a feeling that she was getting interested in me. She often prolonged our lunch sessions by ordering dessert and then coffee. She narrated, probably to win my sympathy, stories of her break-up with her erstwhile husband. She said that he was an alcoholic and never earned a dime. She said she fell for him because he was good-looking and from a good family.

Sheila also got sweets for me sometimes that she had made herself. A couple of times she tried to probe my future plans. Although Sheila was low in my list of targets, I didn't mind that our friendship was flourishing.

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Slowly but surely, life in our little universe at Periscope India progressed. We shipped a couple of releases without a hitch and the upper management back in Rochester was pleased.

They sent T-shirts with the logo of the Minnesota Timber-wolves Basketball team. I went around the cubicles asking shamelessly the size of every employee, and even cracked jokes about the sizes of some of them. But by now they had gotten quite used to my “transparent” style of communication and only laughed appreciatively.

But I felt I was not making much headway towards my real goals. There was only a lot of sweet talking and smiling, but no further action. The girls seemed quite content with just that, but I was starting to get very impatient and desperate. I badly wanted some action, and sure enough some action soon came my way.

One sunny morning I came in at 9 am as usual. And just as usual, an office boy entered my office solicitously and started arranging my cup of tea ceremoniously. He first placed the tray on the table, laid a round piece of design paper next to the tray, lifted the cup with his gloved hands, placed it on the paper, placed the plastic lid on the cup to ensure the tea remained hot, lifted the tray and left. I had got used to this ludicrous ceremony by now, and quickly gulped the tea down my throat.

Just as I was placing the cup back on the table, Preeti tapped on my glass office-door. She rarely came to see me alone, so I was beside myself to see her standing expectantly there at my office door. She was wearing a tight-fitting purple Punjabi dress and looked gorgeous in the light make-up that she had put on. She had her velvety hair dangling loose on her smooth bare shoulders and had large gold ear-rings that flirted with her long smooth neck every time she shook her head to push the unruly tresses back. She looked at me with her bright eyes as if she wanted to rush headlong into my arms. I trembled slightly in my chair and my heartbeat increased considerably.

I opened the door and said, “Hi Preeti, you look so lovely today. What’s up?”

I had never complimented her so openly like this before, but she barely seemed to notice it.

Before she could say anything, I went on and added, “It must be my lucky day to get a visit from the queen of fairies”.

She continued beaming at me and said, “Sir, I would like you to meet someone. I have waited for so long to tell you.”

“Meet who?” I stammered.

“Sir, it’s Rohan; he is waiting outside. He is my fiancé. We have been dating for the last 3 years, and yesterday we got our parents’ permission to get married. I am so happy today. And I thought you would be too”.

That was the end of Preeti. All this time, she had been courting a childhood friend of hers outside her workplace and in the office dealing with her boss – that is me – in a manner that befitted a good employee. When I met her boy-friend who stood at the reception with a box of chocolates in his hands, I felt even more miserable. He was a handsome man sporting a leather jacket on his muscular hairy chest, and faded jeans on his long athletic legs. He spoke flawless English and apparently was a medical student pursuing his post-graduate studies.

Even after dumping this bombshell on me, there was absolutely no change in Preeti’s behavior towards me. She continued to laugh at my crude jokes and join me for lunch. But I now had the sad realization that all that meant nothing.

I was considerably disheartened. I was crestfallen. How could I be so naïve in sensing what a woman was thinking? I cursed myself for wasting my youth in that cold bloody Minnesota instead of staying on in Pune and learning how to win hearts of young women. But hopefully all was not lost. Not yet. There were still Archana and Nayana. And of course, the receptionist Asmita didn't appear too happy in her marriage the way she never smiled and kept sulking. I kept my hopes alive and started devoting more attention to Archana and Nayana.

At the end of nine months we shipped a major release of our product called *Submarine*. To celebrate the milestone I organized a picnic to a famous Konkan beach just like the ones my friends used to boast about. I told my team that the picnic was mandatory for everyone. "In our organization fun is compulsory!" I said laughing.

The team, of course, had no issues. We hired a bus and drove to the beach. We sang songs and played word games along the way and I participated in all of this nonsense until I was exhausted. I sat closer to where Archana and Nayana were sitting and chatted about the scenery outside, the scenery in Minnesota, and so on. I tried to impress them with my knowledge of Nature. I gave up speaking in English and talked with them in Marathi – the language that thankfully we all shared as our mother tongue.

We had booked rooms in a resort for our overnight stay and the rooms were just about a hundred yards from the vast Arabian Sea. The next morning I got up early and went for a walk on the wet sandy beach. To my surprise I saw Nayana strolling on the beach also. There was no one else. The others were apparently yet to recover from the late night card games and music sessions, and were fast asleep in their rooms. I carefully approached Nayana who stood facing the sea and

gazed intently at the waves bursting at her feet. She seemed to be in a deep reverie which I was reluctant to break. But I knew this was a rare opportunity and I should not squander it away. I slowly walked up to her and stood by her side looking straight at the sea. She started a bit when she realized someone was standing next to her.

I quickly said, "Isn't this the most amazing sight? I would any day quit my job just to be here and watch this miracle of nature."

Nayana gave her usual endearing smile and said, "Sir, it's you! I was so shocked."

I was disappointed that she had not bothered to hear my carefully crafted little speech.

But I persisted, "Nayana, you know, my most favorite place is the beach. What is yours?"

She nodded and said, "Mine too. You may not believe it Sir, but this is my first time near a sea or an ocean. This is a dream come true for me."

"Wow", I thought to myself. *"This is a perfect situation. Don't people fall in love in such scenarios?"*

Aloud I said, "Really? There is so much common between us. Would you like to take a walk?"

She said yes.

So we strolled side by side along the beach watching the dull gray morning sky full of monsoon clouds that were slowly moving away from us. In the distance there were faint green



hills jutting out of the seashore. And against the sea there was the coastline – completely dark and green since there was no human habitation in the area except for the resorts cleverly tucked deep inside the greenery. There was still no sign of any of our other team members.

Nayana was in a melancholy mood, and she talked about her parents and the hardship they had suffered in order to help her pursue her dreams.

“But now it’s all in the past. You have achieved your dream. Your parents must be so happy,” I said.

“Yes, you are right Sir. I am happy too that I have reached my goal.”

And then she fell silent. We walked for a long time and I blabbered about sundry topics, intermittently philosophizing about life and the necessity to have fun. Observing that she was completely relaxed I dropped my question.

“Nayana, have you had boyfriends?”

She didn’t appear surprised by my question. Instead she continued strolling at the same pace and said coolly, “Boyfriends? No.”

And then after a pause she added, “You know Sir, men are all the same.”

I was puzzled by her response. “What do you mean?”

She said, “Sir, men seem to want just one thing. Why is that? Why can’t they see us as human beings and see that we have minds and not just bodies?”

Nayana had clean-bowled me. "But what's wrong with having some fun?"

"Yes, fun is fine. But guys have no loyalty. One woman today. Another tomorrow. Men who just want sex are animals. Sir, tell me, is it worth wasting time on boyfriends?"

I was speechless. She continued, "I think my best option is stay single. That is the only way to live a respectable life."

I had clearly lost Nayana too. For sure the wall of boss-employee relationship that stood between us had been transcended that morning on the beach. She had talked so freely about men and relationships. And her argument about men was frighteningly accurate!

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Next was Archana who destroyed my hopes soon afterwards. One day she tapped on my glass door. I sensed déjà vu when I saw her smiling face with a twinkle in her big brown eyes. I was now prepared for another shock and didn't bother opening the door for her. I just waved her in. I maintained my composure when she pushed a box of sweets towards me and told me that she had got engaged to a guy her parents had selected for her. She looked euphoric and completely ready for her new life in which she would share her bed with a stranger, rear kids for him, and take care of his food and other needs.

I tried in my usual way to question the wisdom in coupling with a stranger in this manner. I pointed to the fact that in a male-dominated society like ours the guy probably felt he was doing a favor to her since he had many other options. I even suggested that the guy might be an alcoholic and may not be fit

to be her children's father. She was completely unperturbed by my devil's advocacy. She probably didn't even hear me. She just continued standing there smiling away with her dreamy eyes.

As I sank in my office chair reviewing my failures, I tried to pinpoint my mistake. I wondered why these women could not accept "fun" as a legitimate goal in life.

That day I took Sheila with me to have coffee at the Café Coffee Day. There was little chance of anyone from our office spotting us there since the café was quite further away from the office. I was in a foul mood. I was demoralized due to the debacles I had suffered one after the other.

We ordered café latte as usual and Sheila inquired softly, "Jay, is something wrong?" Sheila was the only one who did not call me "Sir".

I shook my head and said, "Sheila, I can really understand how lonely you must have felt after your husband ditched you."

"He didn't ditch me. I dumped him," she corrected me.

"Yes of course," I said apologetically.

"But I am so glad to have you as a friend. I can share my silly problems with you and get your advice," she said.

I don't know what came over me at that moment, but I suddenly stood up from my chair. Sheila got up too. I went around to her and gave her a hug and planted a kiss on her left cheek. Sheila looked greatly surprised. But she didn't say anything and quickly left the café.

She called me up on my mobile phone a few minutes later, and said, "Jay, I am shocked. I didn't expect this from you. I thought you were a friend."

I felt as if I had been slapped in my face.

"But what did I do? Isn't it ok to express my affection for you this way? In America this is commonplace."

"Not in India. This is not done with ladies in India," her voice trembled, whether with anger or sadness, I do not know. She seemed to indicate that physical touch was wrong and I had breached the trust between us.

I turned my attention to the receptionist Asmita and started pausing by her desk for a few minutes on any pretext and started probing her interests and well-being. She also started to warm up a bit to me, and instead of just giving a blank look, she started standing up every time I came to see her. Once I asked her to have coffee with me, but she told me plainly that she could not leave the phones even for a minute. I felt helpless. One day, I asked her about her husband, what he did for a living, and whether he was a good man etc. Asmita said without blinking, "Sir, my husband is a famous lawyer. A trial lawyer. He works for the city government and specializes in cases of immoral behavior and domestic abuse!"

Just three months after this encounter at Asmita's counter I got married to the first girl selected by my parents. She was pretty but not sexy as far as my standards went. But that didn't matter anymore. I even skipped the option to chat with her and "check her out" before marriage. Wedding was scheduled on the next available auspicious day.

She looked at me at the wedding with her dreamy eyes and said without really uttering a single word, *“You are the one I have been looking for. I will let you sleep with me and enjoy my body, provided you take care of me and my children.”*

I replied to her, silently, *“Yes, I accept your offer.”*

I had had enough of Pune. I had survived the crazy traffic and the equally crazy people of Pune just because of the promise of winning a Nayana or a Preeti. That hope lost, I was done with India. Shortly after the wedding I requested my boss to curtail my offshore contract and I flew with my wife to Rochester, Minnesota for an extended honeymoon.

## **Epilogue**

It has been three years since my return to Rochester. I have a one-year old baby son whom I take out in a stroller for fresh air in the park every evening. I see many other fathers doing the same. They usually push their strollers mechanically while staring at the young mothers in the park who enthusiastically make their toddlers slide, climb, or swing. The mothers hardly notice the guys; they are completely engrossed in helping their kids learn the ropes of life. But the guys – poor devils – continue their hunt for that elusive female who would just want them as a male and nothing more or less.

As for me, I am happy that I have quite a few women friends back in India with names like Preeti and Archana who send me pictures of their babies, and invite me to their birthdays, albeit on Skype. They send me long emails describing how their son or daughter, now potty-trained, demonstrates signs of a genius. They consider me their close friend and freely share their innermost thoughts, although I still feel they have missed out on a big opportunity Nature had bestowed upon them!