

Fall From Away 2

The Korean Boy in Coimbatore

SUBASH

CHAPTER 1

Conference Room B

The man Priya Raghunathan had spent five years not meeting arrived in Coimbatore on a Tuesday in July, at twenty past eleven in the morning, forty minutes late, in a hired white Innova with a dent in the rear door.

She was not downstairs to see it. She had arranged to be busy on purpose.

* * *

It had started, the way the important things in her life tended to start, with a no.

Of the four hundred and nine applications she had sent, eighteen were answered, and seventeen of those said no. The eighteenth came from Seorin Group in Seoul — the first one she had sent, at 11:52 on a Sunday night — and it also said no. But its third paragraph said that Seorin was about to open its first operation in India, with a motor company in Coimbatore, and that with her permission her application would be passed to them.

Priya read it standing in her mother's kitchen and said, out loud, "Coimbatore?" in the voice of a woman who has thrown a ball as hard as she can at the horizon and watched it land at her feet.

"So Korea is coming to you," said Karthik, from the doorway, with his mouth full. "That's efficient."

* * *

Siruvani Motors had made pumps and motors on the Mettupalayam Road for forty-one years. Its managing director, K. Sundaralingam, was sixty-three, wore white shirts so white they amounted to a moral position, and called everybody under fifty *kanna*. He interviewed Priya for eleven minutes, spent four of them asking whether her father was taking his blood-pressure tablets, and hired her on the spot.

"And don't tell the Koreans you speak Korean," he said at the door, pleasantly. "Let them talk. The one who understands and says nothing is worth two lawyers."

Priya agreed with a speed she hoped he did not notice.

Four months later the delegation list arrived. Seven names. At the top, in the same font as all the others, as if it were an ordinary name:

The story continues.

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