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“Hyderabad”

By

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&
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Act One:

An Air India 747 descends from the blue sky and lands at Hyderabad airport in central India. Among the passengers is Sister Marion Smith, an attractive though mousy, 26-year old Roman Catholic nun, wearing a nun’s collar, clutching a suitcase in one hand and her rosary in the other. It’s blazing hot as she descends the stairs onto the tarmac and is immediately accosted by beggars wanting to carry her suitcase to the terminal, but Marion won’t let them.

She is met at customs by an elder, kindly-looking priest, Father Andrews. The Indian customs official asks Sister Smith what is her purpose in visiting Hyderabad? She replies, “To help people.” The customs official nods skeptically and wearily stamps her passport.

The old priest and the young nun drive in a small car into town. Marion can’t believe her eyes—the swarming mass of humanity is overwhelming—millions of people, mostly poor with absolutely nothing, living on the streets, cows wandering aimlessly through the congested streets, monkeys living on the tops of buildings. Marion looks around wide-eyed, there’s certainly no shortage of people here needing help.

The headline of the Hyderabad Times newspaper is: “BELOVED MOVIE STAR KIDNAPPED BY FAMOUS BANDIT.” People are reading the paper and moaning in pain, women are in tears, shrines are being erected to the beloved movie star and flowers are strewn on them.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Raji Shah, a handsome, well-built Indian man of 26, is being released from Hyderabad prison. He has served three years for theft and hijacking, which was his second offense. The Warden warns him that he really does not want to end up in prison a third time as his chance of actually getting out would be quite slim. The Warden tells him to stay straight and keep clean. Raji agrees wholeheartedly and walks off leaving the Warden and the prison behind.

When Raji gets out on the street he sees the pandemonium going on and asks the nearest, bereaved-looking man what’s going on? He is told that the famous bandit, Peeravan has kidnapped the beloved movie star, Makuraj, and is demanding a ransom of 100 million Rupees. Raji asks if he thinks Peeravan will get that much and everyone in the vicinity screams, “*He must get it! Makuraj’s life must be saved!*”

As Raji walks through town, seeing not only the bereaved, moaning, crying people, he also sees thousands of homeless and starving people that no one gives the slightest damn about, and neither does he. Raji stops in front of an appliance store and watches the large-screen TV in the window with a crowd of other people. A news report is on about the abducted movie star, Makuraj, and they are showing a clip of a 1950's Technicolor Indian musical film. We see the young Makuraj, wearing red lipstick, thick turquoise eye shadow and a red line down the center of his forehead, happily dancing and singing. Raji watches and says to himself, "100 million Rupees, eh?"

In yet another part of Hyderabad, Saeed Devi, a suave, white-mustached man in his 50s, and leader of the local mob, sits in an outdoor café drinking a small cup of coffee, smoking a long brown cigarette and reading the newspaper. Devi's men are seated at tables all around him, all drinking coffee, smoking and reading the newspaper. As the mass of humanity swarms past, many people nod or bow respectfully to Devi, but he pays them no mind. As Devi finishes a section of the newspaper, he casually drops it on the ground and someone promptly comes by and picks it up. We see, crouching below the table, a man is busily trimming Devi's toenails. Devi proclaims, "What sort of world is it where our favorite movie stars are being kidnapped! This is outrageous!"

All of the men at the other tables nod in hearty agreement.

A tough-looking man with a scar on his face named Gupa steps up to Devi and informs him that Raji Shah was released from prison that morning. Devi nods and tells Gupa to keep an eye on him. Gupa leaves and Devi puffs on his cigarette, a thoughtful expression on his face. The guy trimming his toenails mistakenly nips Devi who yelps and kicks the guy in the face hard.

Sister Marion and Father Andrews get out of the car in front St. Luke's, a Roman Catholic church set improbably in the center of teeming Hyderabad.

Meanwhile, across the street, Raji Shah comes strolling past. He goes into a print shop and talks to the owner, whom he knows, about a job. The owner shakes his head sadly. Raji shrugs, turns and leaves. When he gets outside and starts up the street, we see the scar-faced Gupa discreetly following him.

Raji goes in and out of one business after another after another asking for and not getting employment. By nightfall he is worn-out, hungry and tired, but has nowhere to stay. Raji sleeps under a bridge with hundreds of other, ragged, homeless people. As Raji looks around at all the poor hungry faces he sees that this is not the way to get ahead or live a long life.

Sister Marion kneels beside a cot in a tiny room at the back of the church, saying her prayers before bed. There is a sound outside her ground floor window. She cautiously opens the window and comes face to face with a cow wearing a garland of flowers.

Marion sighs, shaking her head in amazement, muttering, "Dear God, what have I done?"

Raji searches for a job, but there are none to be had. All the while Gupa keeps an eye on him.

Sister Marion works in a clinic. The lines of sick people stretch out the door and down the block, and each person is a bigger wreck than the one before. Many pregnant Indian women are getting ultra-sound tests to find out the gender of their unborn babies. If they discover they have a female baby they all immediately abort.

Finally, Gupa steps out in the open and asks Raji when he intends to go see Mr. Devi? Raji says, "Never, I'm going straight." Gupa says, "Let me rephrase my statement, Mr. Devi wants to see *you*." Raji shakes his head, "I don't want to see Mr. Devi." Gupa looks at him sadly, "You tell him that, I won't."

Raji sees there's no way out.

Sister Marion kneels in the cathedral of St. Luke's, praying for guidance. Tears stream down her cheeks. She feels helpless and useless, is this what God really wanted of her? She lowers face in her hands and cries. Father Andrews watches and listens to the young nun's sobs.

Raji steps up to Mr. Devi, who still reads the paper. Without looking up, he asks if Raji has been able to find a job? Raji says, "No." Mr. Devi nods, "And you never will. But, you could go back to work for me." Raji shakes his head, "I'm going straight." Mr. Devi lowers the newspaper and looks Raji in the eye, "You go straight when I say you can go straight, got it?" Devi's men all simultaneously lower their papers and look at Raji, who stares directly back at Mr. Devi. Raji says, "It was while I was working for you that I got caught and sent to jail, and I think you set me up." Mr. Devi pours himself another cup of coffee from the ceramic coffee pot, lights a new cigarette and nods, "I did. You were forgetting your place. No one should *ever* forget their place." Raji nods, "What you don't realize, sir, is that *your* place is in the hospital."

Raji picks up the ceramic coffee pot and breaks it right across Saeed Devi's face, knocking him backward out of his chair. The men all jump up from their seats. Raji throws Mr. Devi's table at the men, turns and runs away as fast as he can. Mr. Devi's men all pull out pistols and give chase, one man climbs on a motorcycle.

Mr. Devi is helped up to a chair by two men. His nose is broken and bleeding profusely and one of his eyes is nearly shut. He looks really and truly angry and states, "*Raji Shah is a dead man!*"

Act Two:

Raji runs an obstacle course of vendors and tables and people, jumping over things and through stalls and under tables, and all the while Devi's thugs pursue, including the guy on a motorcycle. Raji turns down a crowded alley and the thugs come after him. People constantly have to be pushed out of the way to get by.

Meanwhile, sitting patiently in traffic is Father Andrews and Sister Marion, neither says a word. Sister Marion's eyes are red from crying. The priest looks at her with great sympathy and says, "God works in mysterious ways."

Suddenly, Father Andrews' car door opens, Raji appears, grabs the priest by his arm and throws him out of the car onto the street. Raji climbs in, smiles at Sister Marion, who has no idea what's occurring. Raji stamps on the gas pedal, swerving out of traffic and onto the sidewalk where the car goes blasting through merchant's stalls and outdoor cafes. Mr. Devi's men run after them firing their weapons, but they are quickly left behind.

Raji turns to Sister Marion and smiles, ready to introduce himself. Marion begins to scream hysterically. Raji doesn't know what's wrong with her, but suddenly must pay attention to his driving as he turns down an incredibly narrow alley, going much too fast, causing people to dive out of his path. In the rear-view mirror Raji sees the motorcycle appear and begin to gain on him.

Raji turns the speeding car down an even narrower alley, obviously built long before automobiles. The sides of Raji's car sparks off both walls as they collide, while carts and stalls fly to pieces as he drives through them. The motorcycle has to swerve to avoid all the flying rubble.

Raji turns on the radio and Indian music comes blasting out.

As they near the end of the alley, Raji turns to Sister Marion and says, "*Hold on!*" They get to the alley's end and Raji slams on the brakes. The motorcycle collides with the rear end of the car and the rider sails over the car through a shop window. Raji backs over the cycle, burns rubber on the cobblestones doing a 360, then goes blasting up a small side street.

Raji asks, "You like Indian music?" Marion shrugs, "I don't know." Raji says, "What do you mean you don't know? You're listening to it."

"So," says Raji, "you're Christian nun?"

"Roman Catholic," says Sister Marion.

"But Roman Catholics are Christians, correct?"

"Yes."

"So I was right. And the Pope in Rome has more money than anyone in the world, correct?"

"The church has the money, not the Pope."

"But you're part of the church, right?"

"A very small part."

"I just wonder how much they'll pay to get you back? If they just pay me a very small part of their very large fortune, I'll be rich."

Marion says, "They'll never pay anything for me. I haven't even taken my final vows yet."

Raji doesn't believe her.

Raji takes Marion to his uncle's house at the edge of town. When they arrive no one is home. Raji tells Marion that his uncle and aunt do not like him, then breaks the lock and they go inside.

Mr. Devi is back to his original position, sitting at the outdoor table reading the newspaper, a new coffeepot before him. He lowers the newspaper and his face is a bruised horror of a mess, his nose is bandaged and his left eye is half-closed. A man steps up, bows politely and tells Devi that Raji Shah has only one relative in Hyderabad, his uncle, and gives him the address. Mr. Devi hands the address to another man who takes it, nods and exits with several other men.

Mr. Devi takes a puff of his long cigarette and winces in pain.

Raji concocts his plan while ransacking his uncle's house and making food. Marion and Raji have a nice meal, then Raji takes Marion out to the horrifyingly stinky outhouse, ties her up, gags her and leaves her there. There is a small window in the outhouse she can see through and watches Raji go back into the house. She then sees him get in the car and drive away. Marion looks around at her surroundings, at the bugs and the filth, and sees that the toilet is gurgling right up to the rim. She closes her eyes and tries not to breathe.

Raji gets into downtown Hyderabad when it's dark and sticks a ransom note on the church door with a knife. Father Andrews, with his arm in a cast and sling, opens the door and finds the ransom note. He reads it and it says that Raji wants a million Rupees, which is far less than is presently being asked for a movie star and is quite reasonable in his opinion, and instructs them to run an ad in the classified section of the newspaper if they accept his terms.

Marion, meanwhile, is bound and gagged in a horrible outhouse attempting to not breathe and still remain alive. There are an incredible array of insects, all of which now try to crawl on her. The toilet keeps gurgling, the contents rising. She hears a car drive up, looks through the window and sees Raji's aunt and uncle get out of a car and go into the house. She can hear their muffled gasps of horror at finding their home broken into and ransacked.

Marion tries to call out to them, but she's gagged and too far away to be heard. Suddenly, the toilet backs up and overflows, soaking Marion's feet and the hem of her dress. Not it *really* stinks!

Raji stops at a friend's house he hasn't seen since going to prison. He and his friend drink a few beers, listen to Indian pop music and reminisce.

Marion sees another car drive up. A group of Mr. Devi's thugs get out, all carrying weapons. Her wide eyes watch as the thugs kick in the door and barge inside. The thugs beat up the old uncle and aunt, screaming, "*Where is he?*" The aunt and uncle reply, "*Who?*" then get beaten up some more.

Raji, somewhat drunk after quite a few beers, leaves his friend's place and drunkenly drives off, the car weaving.

Finally, the thugs get tired of the wrong answers and methodically kill both the uncle and aunt in cold blood. The thugs then proceed to tear the house to

pieces while Marion watches. The fact that bugs are crawling on her doesn't seem quite as important now, but it's still disgusting. Marion hears a car go by, and sees the thugs stop what they're doing and listen. The thugs have left her view. Nothing seems to be happening, everything's gone quiet. As she cranes her head for a better look, the door to the outhouse suddenly opens and it's Raji.

Raji unties Marion and removes her gag, indicating silence. She can smell the beer and asks if he's been drinking? He replies, "Who are you? My mother?" Marion can't believe it, "I'm tied to a filthy toilet and you're out drinking? Those men killed your aunt and uncle." Raji can't believe it and looks honestly pained.

Suddenly, the toilet overflows again, getting all over both of them.

Finally, the thugs give up and leave. Raji and Marion go inside and find the dead aunt and uncle. Raji shakes his head sadly and says, "They always acted like they didn't like me, didn't approve of me, but I always liked them anyway." Raji gathers up some food and blankets, grabs Marion's arm and leads her to the car. They get in and drive away.

Raji and Marion drive to the Godavari River, 200 kilometers north of Hyderabad. Both of them smell awful and keep the windows open. A deserted jungle follows the river for hundreds of miles deep into the interior of the country. Raji drives the car down a jungle road that gets thinner and thinner, then finally just ends. Raji and Marion cover the car with branches, then begin hiking through the jungle.

The thugs report back to Mr. Devi, saying they did not find Raji Shah. One of the thugs mentions the nun he saw in the car with Raji and Mr. Devi looks up and asks, "A nun?" He shows the thugs the front page of the newspaper, with the headline: "CATHOLIC NUN HELD FOR RANSOM." The article goes on to quote a church official as saying, "We don't usually pay ransoms, but instead put our faith in God." Mr. Devi scratches his chin deviously.

As the sun sets Marion and Raji arrive at the river and camp for the night. The setting is spectacularly beautiful. Raji says he's taking a swim and washing his clothes and suggests that Marion do the same. She says, "You mean, naked?" "I'm going to get naked, you can do whatever you want. I'll go around that little bend there and give you some privacy. I'll sing so you know I haven't snuck up on you." Raji goes upriver a bit, ducks into the bush and disrobes, then dives into the water and begins singing. Marion stands there for a minute, then she too disrobes and gets into the water. It's really good to wash off the horrible stink. As Marion floats around, she moves in the direction of Raji's singing. Finally, she gets to the little bend in the river and glances through some foliage to Raji, happily swimming around and singing.

All of a sudden, Raji stops singing and listens. He doesn't hear her and begins swimming directly toward her, not seeing her. Raji swims around the little bend, doesn't see her and appears very concerned, turns and there she is. Raji

sighs in relief. "I'm so glad you're all right," says Raji. "I thought maybe you'd been eaten by a crocodile."

"Crocodiles? In here?"

Raji smiles, "Oh, sure."

They sit on the shore with a fire burning and make some food. The talk and realize that they have a lot in common, considering how different their upbringings. Their both twenty-six, neither has seen much of the world or knows all that much, both have been cloistered away, she in a convent, he in prison, and neither one has ever been in love.

In a moment of pure, blissful lust, Raji and Marion grab each other hungrily, then make love in the fading Indian sunset, reflected off the rippling water of the Godavari River.

Act Three:

It is night and Marion and Raji are asleep, naked in each other's arms in the moonlight.

Suddenly, six bandits with automatic weapons step out of the jungle and surround Raji and Marion, who quickly clamber for their clothing.

Pushing his way through the six bandits is their leader, Peeravan, a leathery-skinned bandit with an enormous waxed mustache, two feet long from end to end. All of the other bandits have weird facial hair, too.

Peeravan and his bandits take Raji and Marion and lead them through the jungle. It's very dark and scary and Raji and Marion hold onto each other. Off in the distance a strange tinny sound can be heard and an ethereal flickering light strangely illuminating the night jungle.

They arrive at Peeravan's camp and the ten other bandits are watching a movie on a sheet nailed to some trees. It's an old Makuraj musical from the 1960s. Peeravan says, "Makuraj is my favorite star." When the reel ends, Makuraj himself stands up from the front row, now 65 years old and smoking a cigarette in a long holder.

"*Now that was a picture!*" declares Makuraj. "They don't make them like *that* anymore!"

Raji and Marion meet Makuraj and find out that he is in fact not a prisoner, but in on the deal with Peeravan. Makuraj was a big star in the 50s, 60s and 70s, but his star waned in the 80s and he hardly worked at all in the 90s and needed the money, so he concocted the kidnapping deal and he and Peeravan are splitting the money, which ought to be coming through very soon.

Raji tells of his own ransom deal with Marion and the Catholic Church. Peeravan and Makuraj look concerned. They both think bringing in westerners is a bad idea. More police scrutiny will certainly come down. They don't like it.

The next day, other bandits arrive back in the camp with the ransom money that has been paid for Makuraj. There is great joy and happiness among the bandits in Peeravan's camp as they split up the money.

Makuraj steps up to Peeravan with his hands full of money and says it was a darn good plan, eh? Peeravan agrees, takes out his pistol and shoots Makuraj in the chest. Makuraj hits the ground and Peeravan takes all of his money from him. Makuraj can't believe what has just occurred and gasps, "But we were partners. We had a deal." Peeravan nods, "But I'm a bandit. I don't make deals," then shoots Makuraj again, killing him.

Raji and Marion are horrified. Marion says, "But I thought he was your favorite movie star."

Peeravan stuffs the money into his pocket and grumbles, "*Ahh! Makuraj hasn't made a good picture in years!*"

One of the bandits that just arrived tosses Raji a newspaper, saying, "Here. I think they answered your ad."

Raji reads it and it says that they will pay the ransom he demanded. Peeravan and Marion both find this odd, but not Raji. "They're the richest organization in the world. Why wouldn't they pay?"

Peeravan says, "I don't like it. It's time for your you two to leave."

Peeravan and the bandits take Raji and Marion to their car, which they wouldn't have ever found otherwise. They remove the branches, open the doors and find a 15-foot Python on the seat. Marion nearly faints. Peeravan laughs, grabs the Python by the neck and lets it go into the jungle. "Pythons are good, they eat rats." The bandits leave.

Raji and Marion drive back into Hyderabad. Both are quiet. They really had a terrific time in the jungle. They had hot sex several times and they've fallen in love. Marion doesn't want to go back. Raji says he has to deliver her, it's part of the deal. It's the only way he'll get the money.

"Forget the money! Let's stay together!" pleads Marion.

"This is my big score," says Raji. "We can date later."

"I'll be a nun again later."

"Then quit."

"Then I'll leave India."

"Then stay."

Raji drives into downtown Hyderabad, weaves his way through the back streets, then pulls up in the alley behind St. Luke's Church. Raji and Marion look at each other, then he gets out of the car, goes around and forcibly takes her out.

They enter the church through the back door. Father Andrews steps up and takes a hold of Marion, quickly pulling her away from Raji. Raji and Marion look at each other, wondering what's going on, when suddenly ten of Mr. Devi's men stand up from behind pews and out from behind pillars, all holding automatic weapons.

Raji and Marion exchange one more look before Mr. Devi's men open fire with their machine guns. Raji is riddled with a hundred bullets. Stray shots smash through the church's stained glass windows and blow statues and candles

to smithereens. Marion and Father Andrews watch as Raji crashes dead to the floor. The weapon's reports ring around the church and the blue smoke rises to the ceiling as Mr. Devi enters through the front door in time to view the final results. He appears satisfied.

Sister Marion, looking pale and shaken, stands in line at the Air India counter at the Hyderabad airport. Father Andrews accompanies her, holding her suitcase. Marion gets her ticket at the counter, then she and the Father silently head to the departure gate.

Finally, Father Andrews says, "Well . . ." hands Marion her suitcase and walks away. Marion quietly watches him go.

Marion stands there looking lost and confused. Her flight is called over the P.A. system and people begin streaming around her heading toward the door out to the tarmac. Marion just stands there.

When everyone has gone past her, leaving her standing there alone, Marion suddenly tears her ticket in half and throws it in the trash. She then yanks off her nun's collar and throws that into the trash, too.

Marion leaves the airport by the front door, heading back into the city. She is quickly lost from sight in the teeming crowd.