

Publisher's Devil

Mohini Mukhopadyaya had risen to the peak of her career before her 21st birthday. Twelve of the biggest publishing houses of Europe and America had merged as BrightBooks, and appointed her as the head of their India office. She should have been very happy, but she was not. She looked at the pile of manuscripts lying at her feet with disgust. She shouldn't have to be poring over such dismal stuff when she should be out there having fun. And Amir had been so – so – what was the word? – attentive, at last night's party. No, she was sure he was like that with every girl! She would take no notice of him this evening – she would cut him dead! Oh, where was he! He said he would stand under her window and sing that old song, whatever it was, from My Fair Lady. That just showed, he was insincere like all boys – what did she care!

Well, she would have to stay indoors till her hair dried in any case, so she might just as well glance at the stupid novels. The first one was Sci-Fi, about the Higgs boson swallowing the world into a black hole and bringing it out into a parallel universe... really the unimaginative stuff people wrote. She threw it down. Maybe she should tell the writer to send it to Parneeta Gangopadyaya. That bitch tried to pretend she was reading Dostoyevski, she had always been full of pretence ever since they shared a desk in primary school. Everybody sniggered behind her back. What were the Italians thinking to make her the Commissioning Editor? That slimy little Jayati Bandopadyaya, who had batted her eyelids at everything in trousers, ever since seventh class, was sneakier, saying, oh, she never had time to finish her novel. Novel! She couldn't write a para for all her Oxford degree. It was just her fast Cockney accent that got her the job of MD of British Publishing! Neera - now Neera Chattopadyaya - was likeable, was respectful to her seniors, but all the same – that publishing giant, everyone

knew, should not have put her in charge, even before she left Loreto Convent School.

As these thoughts raced through her head, Mohini Mukhopadyaya kept tossing away manuscripts, the stupid titles were enough to damn them. Really, how people wasted their time! The last one was about a love affair between someone named Byron and a lady named Melbourne. She laughed mirthlessly, it was absurd to give a character the name of a city. You might just as well name the hero Gurgaon, she thought, as she looked out.

Her hair was almost dry, and just as she rose from the sofa, a slim manuscript popped up from behind a cushion. She looked at it aimlessly, turning a few pages. Soon everything else was forgotten. She lay back turning the pages, as in a dream. It was a real story!

It was about this girl who comes to the big city looking for work and finds the job of a lowly clerk. The bachelor boss is young, handsome, and rich, and hardly notices her. Why should he? He must be meeting all these glamorous women, who were scheming to get his money but never really loved him, but how would he know, he was just a man. Then one day she is waiting in the rain for a bus and he gives her a lift in his Rolls. His hands are so strong! He even escorts her to her door. Then, he doesn't even say hello to her for days and days. Her heart sinks. He had never really noticed her. He was just being kind as to a dog. To lift her spirits she goes to see a movie and he is sitting next to her! He takes her out to dinner in a classy restaurant. The waiter looks down his nose but he – HE - treats her like a princess. She floats on air. He asks her out again. Then, two weeks later, asks her to join him in his beach resort in Goa. She had to say, 'No', brusquely, how could he think she was that kind of girl? She had turned

him down, and her heart was broken forever. She refuses to look at him, ever again.

Then one day she gets an invitation from his mother, His Mother! For Dussera! She goes and meets a kind old lady and his crippled sister who live in their mansion in Goa! Oh, how wrong she was, she could have killed herself. He would never ask her again, she was the most miserable woman on earth. But already his Mother insists she should accompany her to Goa, calls her 'daughter' what – what could she mean? Helplessly as in a dream she accompanies the old lady – the – the mother and her dear daughter – she couldn't have wished for a better sister – to Goa. As she gets down from the car she sees him riding, urging his black horse with his strong hips to leap those fences, and then he is beside her miraculously, his strong lithe body erect, and he holds her in his strong sweaty arms, and...and....

This was the book! She would publish it. Have it released in London, Maybe invite the poet laureate to be chief guest, get a translator, interpreter, whatever – what was she thinking – would she need a translator? – the poet laureate may speak English, right?