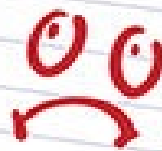


My Clingy Girlfriend



- Madhuri Banerjee

'A superbly funny, irreverent
take on relationships from
a man's point of view.'
- Ravi Subramanian.



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MADHURI BANERJEE



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For Bala: Thank you for encouraging me to go beyond my comfort zone. Without your love, support and inputs, this book would not have been possible.

For my brothers: Ani, Taju Dada, Bujum Dada, Bubam, Babush, Chotu, Jadu. And my dad – Dhrubo who is my hero. And to Gopal Uncle who always keeps me in splits.

Cheers to the Bengali roots!

For Ariaana – My sweetest treasure. My proudest accomplishment. I wish the best for you always and pray you will become a wonderful lady.

I can honestly say that I, Obrokranti Banerjee, know jack shit about love. Nothing. Nada. Zip. Yet I am in a relationship. It is actually the most intense relationship I have ever been in after my mother finally let me go out into the world alone at the age of twenty-five. But then you can't blame my mother. All Bengali moms think their sons are Jesus Christ and they themselves are the Virgin Mary.

The thing is that most Bengali men don't know a thing about women. I am no different. When I finally started working in Mumbai and met this beautiful woman, I immediately proposed using the only pick-up line I knew: 'Is there an airport nearby, or is that just my heart taking off?' She laughed so much that we became friends in an instant. When I proposed a few hours later, asking if she wanted to be my girlfriend, she immediately said yes. I should have known something was fishy right then. We were both four drinks down at a kid's birthday party and neither of us knew what we were getting into.

But here I am two years later with the same girl and things are great. Just great. Yup. Great.

Who am I kidding? They're not great. My girlfriend is a psycho. She is the clingiest girlfriend in the world. Space and time as a concept do not exist for her. She wants to be with me all the time. She stalks me. She hounds me. She wants my world to revolve around her. She's utterly and completely mad. Yet I cannot let go of her. Why? Because I'm bloody scared.

Two reasons. One I might never have a girlfriend again, and a robust, young Bengali man like me needs to show off to his peers that he can have any woman he wants. Even though, deep down, I know it was a fluke. Second, because I need to beat that idiot cousin of mine Shubir, who has so many women flocking to him all because he looks like a *bhadrolok* at the *pujo pandals* every October. I mean, I did try, but somehow my dhoti kept flying up, making a caricature out of me. So I decided to stick to wearing jeans and a kurta at the *pandals*, and the Bengali women have never looked at me after that. I mean no self-respecting Bengali wears jeans. At pujo.

Therefore, I am stuck with one woman as compared to Shubir who has a harem of them.

My clingy girlfriend does love me though. She cooks for me. She cares for me. She asks me where I am and what I do on a regular basis. Almost fifty to sixty times a day. And she always accompanies me to all events – official, personal, even boys' night out. A boys' night out should mean a man can get away from his female partner to go out drinking with his guy friends. But she insists on coming along, saying she hasn't met them for a long time either. Ideally, the two should never mix. Keep the woman in your life separate from your male friends. There's a disaster waiting to happen right there.

Recently my friends have been too busy to have a boys' night. I've called them a couple of times and could hear some loud rock music and laughter in the background when one of them said they were working. I wonder if they were lying?

I have thought about leaving my girlfriend. But then I might never have sex again. I mean with a real girl. There are only so many Sunny Leone videos I can download. My hard drive is on the verge of collapsing. And she really is good in bed. My girlfriend I mean, not Sunny. Sunny, I know I will have one day, as soon as I have the courage to use my pick-up lines on her. But sometimes I have to stop myself from screaming out Sunny's name in bed and quickly use my super-brain to change it to my girlfriend's, Radha, and it comes out as a hiss like Sss – radha and she always gets mad if I'm thinking of someone else. This is when I say, 'No baby, I was moaning in pleasure and then said your name.' Hehe. She buys it.

Some things my super-brain can't quite figure out though. Every time I get back from the bathroom I see my phone's display glowing. Sometimes, I could have sworn I had certain messages from my female colleagues in my inbox, but they're gone when I check later. Sometimes my mother says she called but I didn't pick up. And it's not even in my missed call list. Ma thinks I'm making excuses but honestly, I would never ignore my mother. I worship her. She's always been the first woman in my life and will remain so. I think Radha is a little jealous of that fact. She wants to be the first, second and last woman ever for me. God, how I feel caged!

I make sure I never miss a call from Radha, though. Because if I do, she'll land up in my office. 'Baby, I thought you'd died. I was so concerned,' she said one day when I was in a meeting. My colleagues didn't let me live it down for the entire week. So I always pick up Radha's call. No matter what I'm doing. I still have the liberty to ignore my mother's. Sometimes.

I know Radha is possessive. But then who is not in this world? Every relationship is fucked up. Shubir, my cousin, who is also known as Lengtu, was in a relationship where his girlfriend almost forced him to get married. It was then that he came up with a brilliant plan. The *kundli*. Now whenever he wants to break up with a girl, he tells her, 'Darling, I would happily spend the rest of my life with you, but my punditji says our *kundlis* don't match. And I can never go against our punditji. It's just bad karma for both of us.' Indian girls understand: nothing matches the power of a matched *kundli*. Even though half a dozen of them end up divorced later. But then, that's not the parent's problem. At least they matched the *kundli*. Goddamn Lengtu has fooled about twenty women like this. The rest were mutual separations. Even the girl couldn't stand his chauvinistic ways after a few days.

I once tried the *kundli* story with Radha. She said she would match it with her punditji and came back with the result that we were a faultless twenty on twenty. Perfect match. Why am I not surprised?

Don't get me wrong. I *am* somewhat happy to have Radha in my life. Although, sometimes I wish she were more independent. She is a housewife, you see. Even though we aren't married yet. She says she's preparing for the role. She sits in my house the whole day long and orders the maid around. And if the maid isn't cleaning properly, she calls me in office so I can also scream at her. This is also what she does with plumbers, carpenters, drivers, electricians, internet-walas, newspaper boys, the milkman, vegetable vendors, car cleaners, and the tailor. She will immediately call and say, 'Baby, the tailor is saying he can't deliver my blouse by tomorrow. Tell him to do it!' And then hand him the phone. And I will then lower my voice, since I am invariably in the middle of an office meeting, and speak to her tailor about a blouse that she needs for God knows what reason by tomorrow. But that's my job. To make her life easier. Otherwise she'll make my life hell.

I know my colleagues think that our relationship is strange, but really, it's fine. After all, I am the master of the house. And she waits for me to come home before she goes out anywhere. Which I think is very dutiful of her. Though this means that, most of the time, I have to rush back so that we can go out for groceries, or for dinner or to meet people or to shop for her. By people, I mean her friends and family. I have not met my mother now for a year. She doesn't let me go to Kolkata to meet her. She starts crying whenever I start making a plan. Then I have to make some excuse to my mother. My mother has threatened to visit anytime now. Haha. Then we shall see the fireworks. And I will leave both of them to sort it out for themselves and go out for my much-needed boys' night out.

Radha reads a lot. She reads books the entire day. She says she doesn't remember after a while what she has read, because she reads so much. However, whenever I want something my way, she quotes a line from some classic that makes me relent. One day I asked her which classic she was quoting from and she said, 'Oh you know, Dickens.' And since I've read Dickens, I thought I could try and remember which character and we could play a guessing game. So I asked, 'Which novel?' And she

just glared at me and said, 'All of them!'

I try not to piss her off too much. She is a beautiful creature. With long brown hair that reaches her waist and sparkling brown eyes, she is the epitome of Ma Durga. She just wants to banish all that bad in my life. That's why I have tried to give up cigarettes. I smoke only in office and before I go home. On weekends, I go for a long walk and smoke. Later I pop a whole box of mints and pray hard that she doesn't catch me.

The smoking is a result of being in a very high-pressure job. Marketing for a flop channel is tough. We started off being a page 3 'lifestyle' channel, and right now we just have music and one reality show that's trying to run on shock value. There are dozens of 'programming' people who try to think of new ways to ruin the channel, and there's us in the marketing department, who shoot down their ideas.

The channel doesn't allow me to flourish to my true potential. Either it is a money problem or it's a poorly-made program problem. It's impossible to function creatively and use all my talent when you have such restraints. I am surrounded by nincompoops. The programming head comes up with weird show ideas, and since he has the CEO by his balls, he uses up the entire channel's money making stupid programs. For example, to add variety, they decided to do a show which had a man and a parrot answering questions on love from the audience. I mean that's utterly absurd. How does any man know anything about relationships? Stupid. And the parrot once said 'Fuck you', which we had to beep out. Seriously.

I can't take the pressure sometimes. The marketing head is in cohorts with the programming head and together they're conspiring to overthrow the CEO and take over the channel themselves. As advised by the parrot. No kidding. So anyone who opposes either of them gets the boot. And if you don't say anything, then the show flops and we're blamed for not marketing it properly. It's just too much. Once I came up with the idea that we should have a quiz show about our rich history with the super-brains of the country like Siddhartha Basu and Derek O'Brien. Have two people pitted against each other in every episode. Obviously, my idea was too intellectual for the idiots running the channel. 'We would need someone glamorous to host it then,' said the programming head. 'Someone intelligent too,' said the marketing head. 'Priyanka Chopra!' they yelled simultaneously. Then they said it would be too expensive to get her, and they dropped the idea. Idiots.

So, for now, I am going to just go along with whatever my bosses say. I'm turning twenty-eight next month. I hope things will change then. My family astrologer says a momentous change will occur in my life after I turn twenty-eight. My mother has been waiting for it eagerly. She even made me wear a pokhraj ring for success and a gomedh to control my *rahu*. I can feel it working every day. Success is around the corner. And sex too. But I'll get to that soon.

When I woke up this morning, Radha was already up and sitting in a corner with a cup of tea. She refused to talk to me. When I asked her what was wrong, she said, 'Nothing.' So I continued to read the paper and quickly finished my cereal. She refused to make me eggs and toast this morning, choosing instead to give me a dirty glare. I asked her again what was wrong and this time she said, 'You should know!' How would I know? I just woke up. And going by last night's hectic activity, I would have thought my stupendous stamina would have satisfied her for at least twenty-four hours.

I left for office rather quickly and didn't have time to check again. Many things were on my mind. Today the marketing and programming departments were headed to Resort hotel on Madh island for a conference. We were going to spend the night there, continue the meeting the next day and then all of us would depart in the evening. This is the so-called fun part of my job known as 'brain storming' AKA 'mental masturbation'. I had mentioned this to Radha a few weeks ago and she had acted very strangely about it, begging me to come home since she couldn't sleep alone at night and was afraid of the dark. Now that's ridiculous. A grown woman who is afraid of the dark? It's like saying the royal Bengal tiger is afraid of the jungle.

While I was riding to Resort hotel, I could feel my phone vibrating furiously in my pocket. By the time I reached, I saw that Radha had sent me seventy-five messages explaining why she hadn't wanted to say anything in the morning. God, that woman can type a whole lot of shit. If you're going to say 'Nothing', then you should bloody well shut up after that. But she continued with how I was an insensitive knob who didn't care about how she felt and had gone off without even checking if she was okay. Um, hello! Didn't I say, 'I would have loved to have your eggs this morning,' before I left? That's supposed to mean I love you! Seriously, women are from another planet. We just put up with them for sex.

So, anyway, I called Radha to ask what had happened and she said, 'I had a dream about you with another woman and it freaked me out.'

Fact: most women at some point in their lives have had *a dream* about their man with another woman and then gotten angry about it. They will then be pissed off the entire day, and not speak to the man or will scream at him for a small little thing that they would generally ignore. Like, 'You've left your wet towel on the bed again? I cannot live with this shit anymore. I can't believe you're so insensitive to my feelings. You don't see me as a person at all. No wonder you're willing to cheat on me.'

And really, it won't even be about your towel. And the man will have no idea where that came from. Dreams, my friend. Beware of them.

Women are always insecure about their man going after another girl. And it's actually just that which drives us to the other woman. If a woman were confident of herself and trusted the man, she would know that he chose her because he thinks she's the one he wants to be with. Instead, she'll have dreams and become suspicious.

I assured Radha very quickly that it would never happen (in dreams and in real life as well) and I was devoted to her. But before I could hang up she started howling and I had to calm her down. When are the bloody girl friends to look after your woman when you need them, I say? She is supposed to talk to her friends about this stuff. I took a deep breath and asked her, 'Why would I go with anyone else when I have the most beautiful creature with me?'

She said, 'In my dream, you wanted to sleep with someone thinner and had begun flirting with Kiran and then ended up in bed.' She continued to cry. Now excuse me for taking a moment to picture the myself, and get a hop. I haven't been with another woman for two years now, and this fantasy has never crossed my mind until she planted it! Though I wouldn't be surprised if Kiran had had the fantasy of me. I've seen her looking at me several times. I know my intellectual manliness is a big turn on for the ladies.

When I took a moment extra to respond, she became infuriated and said, 'This is not the answer you wanted! You are so out of tune with me.'

'Baby, chill now. We'll discuss it when I get back,' I said, while wondering why I was still standing outside Resort hotel with a bag at my feet instead of having checked in, and relaxing alone in a room with this vision of Kiran.

She continued to sob.

I pointed out one minor detail that she was forgetting: 'Radha, darling...this was a *dream*. You're in a dream. It wasn't real.'

Radha's voice took on a very high pitch. 'Dreams are a manifestation of some act that is carried out in daily life. I read it in a book.'

I immediately made a mental note to burn the book if I ever found it. I said, 'I promise to behave myself from now on.'

(Great insight – I always behave badly for four days every month. Every month. Period.)

'How?' Radha asked.

I sighed and said what every man says to keep the only woman who is willing to give him sex in his life happy, 'I will do whatever you want.'

I could hear a sigh at the other end, and then Radha said more cheerfully, 'Will you come home with me tonight then?'

Home? Why should I go home? This was a legitimate excuse for me to spend the night out drinking and singing with the boys. I hadn't practised my old Hindi songs for so long and I knew that after the conference we would all be down a few pegs and wouldn't mind each other's off-tune voices belting out Kishore Kumar numbers. I didn't want to go home. I had to think of a reasonable excuse quickly.

'Baby,' I said in my sweetest tone even though my masculine Bengaliness has given me a deep resonating voice that makes the women go weak in the knees. 'It's mandatory for us to stay here. It's all for team bonding. The boss will not allow me to leave.' Radha insisted that she speak to the boss but I said that since the conference had started, and I was already late by an hour because I was chatting with her, he would get even angrier. Radha made me promise that I would call her as soon as we had a tea break in another hour to discuss this. Since it was the only way she would hang up, I promised.

Needless to say, the first session of the conference didn't go too well for me. With visions of me making mad passionate love to Kiran and figuring out how to get out of going home for the night, I couldn't concentrate too much on what was being said. Raghav, the idiot marketing head, threw a piece of chalk at me and asked me where my brain was. If I had told him, his brain would have reached there as well. Kiran is definitely hot and definitely thinner than Radha. Instead, I told Raghav I had an upset tummy and needed to be excused to use the toilet.

Crapping is the best excuse you can give another man. No woman gets this. If a man needs to crap he is excused from anything. Only men understand *that pressure*. And you don't want to stink up the conference room with your day-old gas. You're always allowed to get up and leave to go shit even if you are meeting the prime minister who, I'm sure, goes several times of the day to get away from the

people around him.

~~The loo is where a man can finally be alone. From girlfriends, bosses, work, life, and whatever going on, to just be free with his shit. Literally. Those peaceful moments are few in a man's life, and God understands this. That's why he made men's metabolism better than women's. So we could spend more time in the bathroom, away from the opposite sex.~~

When I had cleared my system of all personal issues, I went back to the conference ready to dazzle them with my intelligence. The marketing and the programming head, Raghav and Ramesh, who I liked to call the Tweedledee and Tweedledum of our organization, were going on about how we needed to change the vision of the company by modifying its brand offering. Like it can happen overnight! Nike suddenly decides to not be a sports company but sell sanitary napkins, you think women will buy the product and with 'JUST DO IT' to boot? It's not so easy. What were these idiots talking about? This was a waste of time. I honestly felt that we should just call it quits and head straight to the bar for a drink. After all, I had to head back for the night because my clingy girlfriend couldn't sleep alone in the dark.

The first session lasted a little longer than usual because everyone had made high-flying power point presentations (called decks) that lasted over the five-minute timeline given just to show what grades they were at it. They'd added videos and many semi-nude photos of Bollywood heroines that kept Tweedledee and Tweedledum on the slides even longer. So, the tea break came a whole two hours later instead of just one.

I quickly ran out to call Radha as she had given me forty-five missed calls by then. She answered after half a ring. 'I was going to call the police!'

'I'm so sorry, baby,' I said apologizing immediately so we wouldn't waste any time on why I was supposed to be sorry.

'WHO THE HELL WERE YOU SLEEPING WITH?' she screamed back at me.

I tried to explain to her that the session took longer than usual but she wouldn't listen. She asked again, who I was in bed with, and I was tempted to say Kiran but then stopped myself. My super-brain realized fast enough that it would lead to more trouble if I were sarcastic rather than continuously apologetic.

'Did you know I was feeling insecure?'

'Yes, baby.'

'Did you know I wanted to talk to you?'

'Yes, baby.' Men need to sound like a broken record for women to forgive them. Any logical arguments or questioning back could result in broken bones for the man.

'Did you know I needed reassurance?'

'Yes, baby.'

'Then why didn't you call when you said you would? Tell me the truth.'

I felt like I was on an interrogation stand, and honestly, I wanted to yell back Colonel Jessup's line from the film *A Few Good Men*. 'You can't handle the truth!' I wanted to say. 'You don't want the truth because deep down in places you don't talk about at parties, you want me on that wall, you need me on that wall.' Same tone. I thought I could pull it off. Radha would kill me if I made a joke now though. Women want a man with a sense of humour, but refuse to see the funny side when they show it.

So instead, I desperately tried to comfort her using the same words I had so many times: 'Baby you know I love you. I'm so sorry. It will never happen again,' and added, 'I couldn't help it. Those nincompoops just kept going on and on about how the company needs to be something else.'

‘So you couldn’t message me? Your fingers were also paying attention to them?’

~~Now here’s the thing. Most men’s brains freeze up during an argument with the woman in their life.~~

While a woman can and will lucidly rant about her feelings, the man will not be able to say a thing. And then when she screams at him to ‘say something’, all he can come up with are the things that he vaguely remembers from previous arguments.

I’m convinced studying for the tenth boards is a way to help men mug up standard sentences to say to women in adulthood. This rote system of education was invented just for brain-dead men. It saved us from saying anything foolish and managing to get some extra time until the grey cells kicked in again.

The only way she would hang up was if I promised I would go back for the night after the conference. There went my drinking session. I hung up, and by this time, the second part of the session had almost started. I hadn’t even had a chance to have tea and those lovely mini sandwiches and samosas that were served.

I was now ravenous. Bengalis should never be hungry. Never. They become like Bengal tigers hunting for prey. In human terms, they become angry, cranky, snappish, irritated, and more intolerant than they generally are. This goes for both men and women. A way to a Bengali’s heart is to give him great food. Not a nutritious diet program. Bengalis have no custom where they need to fast. We do not believe in starving ourselves for the welfare of someone else. Teej, navratras, shraavan – these are never celebrated by Bengalis. And even if they marry into a community that follows these festivals, they will find a way to sneak in some food during the day so they don’t get a headache and die from starvation. The biggest Bengali celebration – Durga Puja (*pujos*) – is all about what *bhog* we’re going to have and how many *mishtis* we’ve downed.

So when I went back into the conference room, I was pissed. My stomach was growling, and the fact that my evening plans were busted didn’t help. I had nothing to lose when I started my presentation. I was ready to chew people alive!

My presentation was going to be different from the rest. I was told to explain with data why our television programs in the last quarter had failed. My PPT (AKA, the deck) had slides on each of the programs and research on why they hadn't taken off. I began with a powerful statement, 'Seven shows were launched in the last quarter. Out of them, five were flops!' I had meant to say 'didn't do well' but the hunger pangs were making my temper rise, and when my temper rises, I don't mince words.

'Let's start with the first one, the skimpily clad anchor talking about Bollywood classical songs. This has done so badly because it was scheduled at the same time as *Bigg Boss*, which has always had high ratings. Also, families are watching at this time, and they don't want to see old Bollywood songs. So no sponsor wants to come on board.' In a nutshell, I wanted to say, the jackass that came up with the concept probably borrowed an idea from a porn channel, and then decided to put it on prime time television. But I need my job so I managed to stop myself. I continued giving them facts and figures on the show and I could see Raghav – Tweedledee – was impressed.

'Let's move on to the second – live the celeb life for a day.' Before I could give any figures about it a Punjabi guy called TJ interrupted me, saying, 'Wait a minute. I don't agree.' Then he went on to tell everyone that he'd overheard people talking positively about the first show, and everyone seemed to light up with this news. I was fuming. What did this fellow know? North Indians should just stay in the north drinking their RC. They are not refined, intellectual gentlemen like Bengalis, who only drink single malt. Superior taste means superior intelligence. A superior intelligence means the bloody fool was wrong and I was right.

'Just a minute TJ,' I said, cutting in, and then continued in a more calm manner, 'Just because you heard some canteen boys talking about the porn show doesn't mean the buyers have liked it. I have statistics on my side. Facts. Data. You want to say all that is nothing?'

'Not nothing OB, but you must take another viewpoint as well, shouldn't you?' he asked.

Others nodded their head in agreement and both Tweedledee and Tweedledum looked amused. They would rather have a fight take place in the conference than get any proper work done. It increased office politics and made for great gossip that would be circulated around for weeks. Kept most people occupied at lunch and around water coolers, instead of actual work getting done. Their shared belief was that fights showcased competitive spirit and passion in a corporate office. It also meant that the position was under no threat since the asses were busy fighting amongst themselves. Well played.

I didn't want to start a fight. But I was right. So I wanted to stand my ground. Who was this chit of a Royal Challenge whiskey drinker to say that I, me, Obrokranti Banerjee (who drank, or rather had drunk, once, in the Kolkata Club and thoroughly enjoyed and chosen to make it his drink, eighteen-year-old, extremely rare Glenmorangie) was wrong?

So I replied, 'Of course we are all free to take everyone's opinions, but the opinions that count are the advertisers', don't you think? If they don't give money for the program, then how can we run it? Or are you saying we should spend more money and do more research on this just to keep the program going? That would mean spending three lakh rupees an episode, TJ. Where will it come from? Should we all go out with a donation box to collect it?'

For a moment, he may have considered it. The entire room was quiet, waiting for him to respond. They could take sides and scream 'Go TJ' or 'Go Obro' while we wrestled on the boardroom table.

'I just think we should try to rope in the sales people for this meeting and see if they can do a

integration and keep this show alive.’

Tweedledee butted in, ‘Why don’t we have anyone from sales here? Didn’t anyone call them? Don’t they know how important these meetings are? TJ, make a note and tell them your idea when we get back. And next time they should join us for these brainstorming sessions.’

Another tactic to divert from work in a corporate office is to blame people. Who should have done what. And why wasn’t so and so informed. It can take hours, at the end of which people are exhausted and need a break from talking about nothing important.

Even though I had won this round, TJ was from the land of makki ki roti and sarson da saag and wouldn’t let anything go. He would argue this out or get revenge. Neither of which I was looking forward to. You see, I am a gentle type of a man. I would rather just read books and smoke a pipe while listening to music, and have someone press my feet and my wife bring me some tea and Marie biscuits. That’s all I want from life. But to get there I need to work hard, keep my bosses happy and not make colleagues want to take revenge on me. This is too tough sometimes.

I continued to present the rest of the slides and thankfully a plate of biscuits soon came into the conference room and I gobbled down some twenty of them before the half-empty plate was passed around. My presentation took a little longer because of the delay caused by TJ and me fighting on almost every point, and it was almost three o’clock when we broke for lunch.

I was starving again by then, and filled my plate at the buffet counter just in case I couldn’t get a line for seconds. I sat in one corner and my semi-friend Menon came by. I call him my semi-friend because we hang out in office sometimes and step out for smokes together. I know nothing about his life and he hasn’t the faintest clue about mine. We just nod to each other and speak in monosyllables. Why can’t all my relationships be this good?

He sat next to me and said, ‘Hello.’

I looked up at him and said a cheerful, ‘Hello.’

We ate in silence. A bearer came to ask us if we wanted something to drink and we both asked for a Coke. At that moment, this man was the only person in the world who was in sync with me. After we finished eating, someone cleared our plates, he offered me a cigarette, and I took it. We sat and smoked, looking around at a few people chattering away, the gossipy types who wanted to network. TJ was speaking to Ramesh – Tweedledum – trying to suck up to him even more. These Punjabis, I tell you; they’ll try to make an impression any opportunity they get. I wanted to say something profound to Menon so I blew out smoke and said, ‘Market deck next, huh?’ He nodded. I nodded back. That was it. We got each other. We didn’t need words. We didn’t have dreams that needed explanation. There was an underlying communication that meant, ‘I don’t really care, but I’m here bro!’ We finished smoking and went back inside the conference room.

TJ gave me a dirty look as he sat down. I ignored him. Gentlemen do not respond to such kind of behaviour. And I intend to be one. The rest of the session went off well – TJ butted in on most of the presentations, and by the end of it, both Tweedledee and Tweedledum told him to shut up so they could get on with it. I think they were both so bored they wanted the bar to open ASAP (as soon as possible).

We wrapped up at the dot of six. The poor marketing intern who was in the middle of saying something got cut off by Tweedledee, who announced, ‘That’s a wrap, guys. We have other important matters to discuss.’

Suddenly the bickering, accusatory, opinionated men became long-lost buddies willing to share anything in the world. They all headed to the bar with far better spirit and even ribbed each other about how they had been downloading the porn anchor show on their laptops. I looked at them and

sighed. I had to head back to my lovely girlfriend who had already given me twenty-one missed calls and sent twelve text messages asking whether I had left or not.

As I got onto my bike, TJ and Menon walked out of the bar with drinks in their hands. When they saw me, TJ burst out laughing so hard, he spilled half his drink. He must have already downed one or two shots of his RC inside. Menon, however, looked at me with an expression of sympathy, and with a half smile that only made his face look crooked, he raised his hand to say bye. He knew. I understood. I raised my hand too, and kept it there a second longer as if to say, 'May the force be with us.'

And with that, I called Radha to tell her I was on my way home, and yes, I was looking forward to meeting her after such a long time. It had only been twelve hours since I'd left the house. Women count the seconds while you're away. Men count the days to be away.

Radha makes me feel what the poor ring must have felt about Gollum. I am playing 'Radha and her "Precious" Obrokanti'.

As I headed back home from Madh island, I saw my life racing past in my mind. How had I ended up like this? At the tender age of twenty-eight, I was already moulded (AKA ‘changed for the better’) by my girlfriend, owned by my boss and whipped by my landlord. I could have easily stayed in Kolkata and lived in a palatial ancestral home with a large family that pampered me. Instead, I chose to leave it to pursue another dream. The dream of having more women than my stupid cousin Lengtu.

Lengtu is the complete opposite of me. He has a way with words. He can charm anyone and he has a dazzling smile that women think is genuine. Genuine my ass. All he has wanted from an early age is to get into their pants. He would get into our aunt’s room – pretending that he’d forgotten the way to his room – just to watch her change her sari. When he was eleven, he saved up his allowance so he could buy binoculars to look into the neighbour’s house where a teenage girl would change into her pyjamas at the dot of ten every night. He begged our father to give him a bike on his fifteenth birthday just so he could take the girls from school for a ride. And then parked in some dark spot to make out.

I was awkward. I tried his moves but they always backfired and soon I lost confidence. So I would tag along with him whenever I wanted to spend time with a woman. He would find two female friends, then, and the one he didn’t like would be mine for the evening. Obviously, I didn’t do anything with her. I never knew what kind of conversation would lead up to a kiss. And what would make her sleep with me. My conversation starters were, ‘So do you like Chandler from *Friends*? What is your favourite colour? Do you like chemistry or physics?’

Sometimes the woman would respond with some affirmation and we would chat about TV shows for a bit. Nothing sensuous. Nothing interesting. And then she would mysteriously get a headache and have to leave. It was no wonder that I was a virgin until I met Radha. I would just come home and masturbate like mad. I respected women, even though I didn’t understand them. I couldn’t use the like sex toys. What an idiot I was. So much time wasted. So many lost opportunities. When you finally slipped away, and I found Radha, I held on to her as tightly as she held on to me. The only woman in my life who I could coax into giving me sex. And somewhere that’s where the challenge lies. If a woman gives in easily, there’s no fun. You need to use your masculine skills for her to finally say yes. Though, to do it every night is a bit tedious and sometimes you just want to tell her, ‘I’ve run out of romantic things to say. Now please can you just take off your clothes?’

You would think that everyone gets to have sex in college. It’s the freedom years man. Men should be bedding women like mad. But my mother loved me so much that even when I entered college, she would make sure she would drop me and pick me up. It was most embarrassing and it’s probably the reason I never got laid in those three years.

Lengtu insisted on taking the bus and his mother let him. But my mother used to say that her sister was making the biggest mistake by doing so. I think she was over-protective about me. She said I was too precious to be sent in the bus. I couldn’t blame her. I am an only child, while Lengtu has a young sister, Nandini. Also, I am far better looking than Lengtu anyway. He is just tall. That’s why he got the pet name (*daak naam*) Lengtu. My *bhaalo naam* (real name on tenth standard board exam paper) Obrokranti is as bad as my *daak naam* Paantha, which means castrated goat. Seriously. My friend gave me that name in college. Till then my mother called me Bablu.

All my Bengali friends have *daak naams*: Potla, Hulo, Nadu, Habul, Ghoton, Gogol, Babush, Bubar, Bujum and Jadu for boys, and Tepi, Puchki, Tuni, Buni, Tumpa, Rinku, Khukhu, Munnie for girls.

With some Facebook friend requests now, I have no idea who they are. I've never heard their real names.

Lengtu would tell me about his exploits with women from the first year of college itself. It started from the first Durga Puja in college where he asked a woman where he should stand in line for *pushpanjali*, since he wanted to thank Ma Durga for all the blessings in his life. Bull. He wanted to stand closer to the woman and look down her blouse. She was quite impressed and later showered him with blessings in the park behind the *pandal*. Bloody hell.

When I tried the same tactic the next day, the woman said in a loud voice so the entire *pandal* could hear, 'Oie deeke aache aar iktu shoro!' (That side and move a little!) I was so embarrassed that I didn't even attend Maha Navami pujo, which is my favourite because of the awesome *bhog* we get later.

By the end of those five days of Durga Puja, Lengtu told me he had been with five women. I said the only thing that I had learnt in college that we used mercilessly to anyone who tried to bullshit us was 'Baler kotha Basuram ke giye bolo.' Talk such bullshit to Basuram and not to me. (*Bal* – slang for pubic hair, used as figure of speech to denote inferior conversation.)

To trump Lengtu, I decided to do an MBA. It horrified everyone.

'Law korbe na?' shouted my grandmother. 'It's the best profession in the world and your Dadabhai said that if you have the gift of the gab and an intelligent mind, you can fool anyone in this world.'

Dadabhai had a brilliant mind. He was one of the best lawyers in the country. However, his progeny and their progeny neither had the gift of talking nor the brains to do anything worthwhile – according to my grandmother. Hence, they couldn't pass the law exam and instead went into soft fields like media, or chartered accountancy. She was still trying to convince at least one grandchild to take up law to continue the legacy, but none of us was interested in it, especially after watching *Jolly LLB*, the Bollywood film that showed how lawyers actually turn out. Because of course, Bollywood reflects the true reality of our times.

I told my family the world was moving towards MBAs and the degree would mean I would get more money into the house. I didn't tell them then my secret desire was to go to Mumbai. The land of voluptuous women who wouldn't have a problem if I stood close to them, because there is simply no space in Mumbai to stand at all anyway.

After my MBA, I got through an on-campus job in Mumbai. It would be in television, and I would start as a marketing associate. Television, I thought, was wonderful. All those women dressed in skimpy outfits not bothering how I was looking at them. It was then a 'lifestyle channel' that had bikini shoots on beaches, travel shows (with two women in bikinis for the most part), women getting on in spas and food shows (hopefully with women in bikinis making aloo poshto). What better place for me to be – my two desires fulfilled. And the pay didn't seem too bad for a twenty-five-year old.

So I jumped at the chance. There was hell when I told the family at home. My grandmother fainted in her typical dramatic style and my mother cried into her pallu. Lengtu had chosen to take his Civil Services exam, again. It was his third and final try. The ass had failed twice before and had taken an entire year to study for it. He was still considered the good boy of the house, because taking exams was considered noteworthy in my family whereas working in a menial position and earning to support yourself is beneath them.

Lengtu barely cared what he did in life as long as he did many women. He used studying as an excuse to join several classes where he would meet different women.

I was the bad sperm that had decided to leave Kolkata and join, of all things, something as disreputable as the media industry. But I promised my mom that I would call four times a day and

would visit every Durga Puja. I told her I would send money back home so she could buy pretty things, and that she could stay with me whenever she wanted to get away from Thakuma, my grandmother. That helped a bit since she has never got along with her mother-in-law. I tried to speak to my father but he said I could do what I wanted, and went back to reading his Dostoevsky. He is the best father in the world.

The channel put me up in a guesthouse for a month till I found my own place. I thought I would manage something close to the office so I wouldn't have to commute so much. That way I would have more time to try and meet girls. This was the first time I had triumphed over Lengtu. I told him when I was packing to leave, 'I'm going to find hotter, bustier women in Mumbai who will lust after me, and you will still have the same Bengalis here. Haha Lengtu da. Who's the smarter one now?'

He was silent, knowing I had beaten him for now. But he smiled and said, 'All the best bro. You'll finally lose it.'

And I did. With Radha. The One and the Only. Who was waiting for me at home. There had better be some food when I got back, I thought. I was starving and craving fish. I needed energy to sleep with her tonight. If I was going back all the way without having a single drink and a single karaoke song, she had better be lying naked in bed for me. The least she could do.

Great insight – women want us to change into better people. Though they rarely remain the same from the time we meet them!

When I got home I saw that Radha was sitting in a corner going through my box of condoms. Yes, I have a box of them on my side table. It looked like she was pricking holes in them. This was not a good sign.

Thank God I always carry a spare in my wallet. I've been carrying one in case I get lucky at a bar. That has not happened yet, but a man should be ready at all times. As the nincompoop CEO says at the bloody time, 'Luck is nothing but opportunity meeting preparation.' And claims that it's his original line, though everyone knows it was Baba Ramdev.

As soon as Radha saw me, she quickly closed the box and ran to me. 'You're home,' she said while flinging her arms around me. Her boobs felt so good against my chest. After a long day staring at ugly men, it was actually nice to come home to a loving woman with large breasts. That was a very good quality about her. I had triumphed over Lengtu in at least that category. He had been dating a girl for the last few months who was small-chested. He was afraid that if it led to marriage, he would never hold big boobs in his hands again. He was thinking it was time to bring up the *kundli*, and in the process 'get some space', but she had refused to give him her date, time and place of birth. Haha. She was clever, and now Lengtu was stuck!

I started kissing Radha, but she was not ready. Women never are! I mean, for all the *Cosmo* magazines they subscribe to, they should at least try some of the moves suggested. Like get naked and begin with. Even for that men have to say, 'Baby, please let me take off your shirt.' And they'll reply 'No. In a bit. Let's kiss first.' Just do it woman! Even after a hard day's work and driving for several hours, women's ridiculous problems like not having internet at home will be too stressful for them. They take off their clothes quietly or give you a blow job. Bloody rubbish.

I had to do all the foreplay and every bit of nonsense that it required to get her in the mood. Earlier I used to just kiss her and she was ready. Now it took forever. And I was afraid I would lose my erection if I had to do any more necking. The time taken to have an orgasm is inversely proportional to the time taken to beg the woman to be ready. So I finished rather quickly and Radha hadn't. Too bad. If I couldn't drink with the boys, I wasn't going to give her any pleasure either.

I put on the TV and asked what was for dinner. Radha said that the maid had made some chicken curry and roti.

'Again?' I whined. 'Every day we have chicken curry and roti. Or dal makhani. Or aloo paratha. It's just too much, I say. Just because you want everything Punjabi doesn't mean I do. I want to have fish. I want to have poshto. I want to have bhaja,' I said, sounding like a five-year-old child. I missed my mommy.

Radha came over, cuddled with me, switched the channel to Zee Café and said, 'You know I don't like the smell of mustard oil. And I can't stand fish. Why can't you be a little more adjusting?'

I took the remote from her, changed the channel back to where the Bengali war hero Arnab Goswami was ranting and said, 'Okay give me whatever there is. I'm tired.' And then I put my feet up while she went to heat up the food. The things I do for her. Give her sex. Not eat fish. Too much for a true-blooded Bengal tiger like me. One of these days I'm going to snap.

While she was inside, I began to think about how we had met. After a year of moving to Mumbai, I realized that I wasn't getting anywhere with the women in office, and it wasn't easy to meet girls at the cheap drinking joints I went to with my colleagues. And we could only afford cheap drinking

joints. My salary actually came to nothing much once they took away PF, gratuity, taxes, LTA, and other shit that the government loots us of. I was left with some seventeen thousand rupees in hand. With that budget, I couldn't find a place close to my office. I finally moved into a one-bedroom place in IC Colony, Borivali. I shared it with a roommate, a nice south Indian boy in my office, but in sales. He travelled often and I had the place to myself most days. This suited me well. We became thick friends, ate at the local Banjara restaurant almost every night, and travelled to work together in the local train. We didn't have much of a life, but we used to drink practically every night and it made us as thick as the tyre around middle-aged Bengali men.

But we never found women. The women who came to these joints had a rate and we preferred alcohol to a suspicious-looking thing in a short red skirt with hairy legs. After all, we had some dignity. I wasn't Lengtul!

I have an aunt in Mumbai called Shoma mashi. She is the oldest of my mother's sisters. My mother has six sisters scattered across the world. Clearly my grandfather had been very busy. Anyway, the Mumbai sister visited us in Kolkata once or twice and pulled my cheeks even when I was twenty-one years old. I had tried to avoid her like the plague after that. One day, out of the blue, she called me and said my mother had given her my number to check up on me. One of the reasons I had come to Mumbai was to get away from my Bengali clan, but it seemed to be chasing me even here. Anyway, no matter which part of the world you go, there will always be a Bengali there. And if you start chatting with them, you'll realize that you're somehow related. And if nothing else, we are all descendants of Rabindranath Tagore and hence need to bond.

'*Tumi bhalo acho? Phone kano korle na?*' (Are you well? Why didn't you call?), she asked, as if it were my one-point program to call or meet her. I gave some excuse but then she invited me for her grandson's first birthday party. 'It's going to be a grand affair at my house in Kandivali. You *have* to come. You live so close by. I don't want to hear any excuses. I'm sending you an SMS with my address. Saturday, four o'clock onwards.'

'Living close by' means nothing in Mumbai. It will still take you two hours to reach a place that is two kilometres away. Either there is a procession, some digging, or a visarjan or a wedding or a protest that will cause traffic to crawl. The entire chawl is on the streets and every policeman is unavailable to clear the path for your smooth movement. Every Mumbaikar says, 'On a good day I can reach the place in twenty minutes.' This good day never comes, and it generally takes between one to three hours to reach anywhere. The good day must have happened when the final over of an India vs Pakistan cricket match was on and the entire country was watching TV while you and some chutiyas were trying to see if you could reach the place in twenty minutes.

Living close by could also mean you are neighbours. Like right across the corridor. A place that would take you two steps to reach. But even then, if you're next door neighbours, you rarely meet. Mumbaikars may be friendly but they definitely don't want to be your friends. They have their own thick group that they rarely meet. Unless you're Gujju, which is a whole different story. Then you would meet for breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee, anniversaries, birthdays, cards parties, movies, and still take vacations together because you feel you haven't met each other enough.

If you're not Gujju, you probably never have the time or the inclination to see your relatives. And even if you do have the time and inclination, the feeling passes quite quickly and you decide you would rather watch TV. Even in this digital era of Whatsapp, BBM and text messaging, who really wants to know how their relatives are doing? That's what conversations with your mother on Sunday are for. So she can fill you in while you pretend to listen.

I tried to give Mashi some excuse for not coming. I said I had work but she said everyone

Mumbai is working and not to give her such gyaan. Then I said, 'I'm quite broke, Mashi. I don't know what to get Babush.'

'*Ei kee!* Such formality! Just come. Otherwise I'll tell your mother that you still haven't visited me. At the thought of my mother giving me a long lecture, I ran out of what to say. These are the times when I feel my super-brain should be working, but after dealing with bad programming people all day, even I run out of excuses. So I agreed to go for her grandson's birthday party.

Living in Mumbai can get lonely. Besides work and your roommate, you don't have anyone else unless you get into a group. And most groups are couple centric. It's the wives who socialize and get their men to meet so a group is formed. Antisocial guys like me don't know how to make friends or get into groups. Actually, most men just go to work and come home to empty apartments. They don't know how to meet and talk to women, and their Friday nights are spent watching TV / porn at home or playing on their PlayStation till dawn. Rarely do they realize they're lonely. Except when they're horny or drunk and really want a woman in their lives.

When I got to the birthday party, the only person who seemed out of place was Radha. She was not a mother who had brought a child, or a grandmother sitting and being served by servants, or any of the uncles who were smoking on the balcony or a maid running after a child. She was a distant cousin or someone who was at the party. No one knew why she was there. She probably didn't either. When I first noticed her, she was standing in the balcony, alone. She looked lovely, her long brown hair cascading down over her huge bosom. Later I would only remember that she was wearing something that showed off her cleavage. Hence, we instantly connected. I used my line and then asked, 'You wanna be my girlfriend?' And she laughed, thought it was so cute and said, 'Yes!' I should have recognized that as a psycho sign. I did not. She sure had me at hello.

She wooed me. I thought that was very hot. A woman wanting me. A big-breasted woman desiring me. But obviously God had saved the best part for later. She took my number and called me repeatedly when I was in office. I would tell her when I was leaving for home, and she would take a rickshaw to my place. Then we would make mad passionate love and fall asleep. I remember I called Shubh immediately after I had lost my virginity to her. 'Lengtu, I did it,' I said in utter jubilation. And he sleepily said, '*Baler kotha Basuram ke giye bolo.*' (Tell such bullshit to someone else.) Bastard didn't believe me. So I went back to bed and did it another time just to prove to him that I could. And to him the next morning again. This time he was impressed. Finally.

Soon Radha moved in and, before I knew it, she was asking when I was coming home after work on a daily basis. She had parents and a large family who were settled in Pune, and she was a typical Punjabi kudi. She was strong, aggressive and wild in bed. She managed my household affairs and I was more relieved that I didn't have to do any of those women chores anymore. You know, like order food, or washing underwear. Now Radha would instruct the bai to do it.

One day I came home and remembered I had a roommate who lived with me. I asked her about him. 'Has Ravi gone for another shoot?' She looked at me and said, 'Who's Ravi?' I was bewildered. I had introduced them, I think, once upon a time, so I said, 'My roommate.' She shook her head and dismissed it as if I were mad: 'You didn't have one.' I went to check his cupboard and it was filled with her clothes. Her toiletries lay all around the bathroom, and many food items that I never ate were stacked neatly in the kitchen cabinets. Like fruits, digestive biscuits and Baked Lays Chips. Who the fuck eats baked potato chips?

I mumbled to myself, 'I never had so much food in the house. We always ate at Banjara.'

After a while, when I was less stoned, I pried it out of Radha. She said one day a guy had come and eaten the food she had asked the cook to make. She had been most upset and he had left after that.

Later I found out from people in my office that she had thrown all his clothes out of the window because, when she had returned after a parlour visit, he had been rearranging her things. My roommate also quit his sales job around the same time. Probably because he didn't have any clothes. Since then we have lost touch.

Two years have passed like this, and here I am, pandering to every need of Radha's and unable to figure out if this is a good life or not. My pay has gone from five to eight lakh, but still there's nothing in hand. It is as if the carrot is perpetually in front of my eyes but I never get it. Further taxes have hit and the same amount comes in hand every month. I could barely get by on my own, and now I have been supporting Radha as well. Honestly, I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't gone to her at the party. Or if Mashu had not called that day. Or if my super-brain had actually worked and come up with a good excuse. Or if I hadn't moved to Mumbai at all.

Maybe I would still be a virgin. Now that's a scary thought.

Was sitting at home after a wonderful session where Radha had agreed to graze my balls with her fingers. It was truly magical for the five seconds it lasted. Women rarely do anything to make you happy sexually. And when they do, it's for such a short time that you feel so grateful. Then they milk it for as long as they can, as if they've done you the biggest favour on the planet. You didn't bail me out of jail, woman. You just made me cum. Which I did myself anyway. But fine, I'll take you shopping. Whatever.

My reverie was broken with a Whatsapp message. It was Nandini, my cousin from Kolkata, asking how the conference had gone. I was chatting with her when Radha walked out of the kitchen. She looked suspiciously at my phone, and at my smile, and decided to ruin my mood. 'Who are you talking to?' she asked.

'Nandini,' I replied.

The ever-so-calm woman burst out, 'WHO THE FUCK IS SHE? ARE YOU CHEATING ON ME?'

So here's a thing I've learnt in this relationship. When a woman is freaking out, the idea is to not dismiss her. You cannot say, like I did, 'Oh, please.' Also, do not roll your eyes while voicing the above statement. This could lead to some injury.

She punched me hard on my arm and shouted some more, 'What do you mean, "Oh please"? Do my feelings not count? You're not denying you're having an affair!'

I tried to calm her down. 'Radha. Nandini is my *cousin*. We are very close. She's like my sister. We grew up together.'

But she would have none of it. She said this rakhi/cousin sister stuff was ridiculous; only an actual blood sister was fine. One could easily screw a rakhi sister. There was no law that said you couldn't. I tried to pacify Radha, but she had a fit, claiming that she had given up her life to spend time with me and was away from her entire family so she could look after me, and here I was having phone sex with a so-called cousin!

I told her that I would take her out for a lovely ride on my Yamaha bike. I had made that one investment so I wouldn't have to walk in the muck of a Mumbai monsoon to the train station. She calmed down, we ate dinner, and then I took her for a long ride to have ice-cream. She felt much better after that and I thought the matter had been dropped.

The next morning I saw that all my conversations had been deleted on my phone and my Whatsapp obliterated completely. She had also deleted every girl's number, except my mother's. I dared not question her. I didn't want an outburst again. I decided I would feed in Nandini's number later under a male Bengali name. Radha would never suspect I was talking to a girl if her alias was Debobroto.

Little did I realize that she would only get more suspicious and paranoid later. (Great insight: Women never forget things. They only have temporary amnesia when you gift them something after a fight.)

In order to help my fellow hapless souls, I now present you with a guide, which I have prepared after intense hours of studying the internet. May it help you. If not, there is always 'Naughty America'.

Five Ways to Get Your Girlfriend to Have Sex

1. Romance her. Flowers, candles, food. The three pillars that will make your pillar have an all-nighter. But if you can't go to such lengths, put on her favourite songs and start dancing with her. D

not grind! Keep your crotch away from her lady parts while dancing. Mumble, 'Your hair smells really nice.' A nice compliment will always get you in bed.

2. Give her presents. Buying something nice for her will always be appreciated with sex. If you've gone shopping with her and let her pick something out, you're the dream man who's getting laid tonight!

3. Talk about the future. Tell her how lovely it will be when you get married and go on honeymoon. Switzerland. Cottages. Fireplaces. Molten chocolate. Satin sheets. Say all the things women have read about in those damn Mills & Boon novels. Painting a picture gets their juices flowing.

4. Balance sensitivity. Ask about her day (but not in any way that will have her give you details). Asking something personal always makes a woman want to open up to you in more ways than one. Gently start massaging her shoulders to ease her tension. Don't run it hard for two minutes and ask her to take her clothes off. Say encouraging things. Get her a glass of water or a drink. Make sure she's relaxed and comfortable. Not enough to actually start chatting with you, but enough for her to 'take her mind off things' by having sex. Play with her hair, run your fingers gently down the side of her neck. DO NOT go near her breasts. Kiss her softly on her neck, back, lips. Leave out any zone that you really want to touch. Pull back after kissing her passionately. Look into her eyes deeply and let her guess. Allow her then to take the initiative.

5. Be confident. When it's a first time, women will have walls. Speak confidently about it and move through the hurdles. 'I don't even know you.' Reply, 'Yes you do. It's me.' 'We're moving too fast.' Reply, 'I think the speed is just right. Or are you just faking that smile?' Say it with a sexy and confident smile. You'll have her in no time! Do not burp or fart at any point. Make sure you eat light before the seduction. You can't use the same tactics every night. Change your game and pretty soon you'll be doing it at least twice a week!

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