

REAL INGRESS

SWEETLY SAMUEL



A HEART WARMING SHORT
STORY

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CHAPTER 1

An Unusual Event in An Usual Day

“Hi, Keerti,” said Sushil as they met in the office hall.

“Hi, Sushil.” Weaning out from the cloud of oblivion, he could observe the clear sign of disappointment in her look. “What happened Keerti? Is everything alright?” he asked.

“I don’t know how to say this, but we might not have our regular Diwali Celebrations this year.”

“What do you mean? Is Kunal teleported to some other world?”

“No, but it’s almost as if he is! When I asked him what he had planned this year, and you and I know how excited he is at this time of the year telling everyone in the locality how its really going to be something different this year, but this time, the only thing he said with a rictus was “Its really unfortunate!!”

“Are you serious?” Sushil could not believe Keerti’s words.

“Yea.. You can bet on it! Maybe you should go and talk to him. You are his best friend, so he might tell you what’s going on.”

It was Wednesday, September 16, one month before Diwali and every Wednesday, Kunal and Sushil would have lunch together in an Old Iranian Restaurant.

Kunal Agrawal was the kind of person everyone would simply adore. He held an esteemed position at Lionel Export Ltd., the

internationally well-known company. He had been a very smart and a hard worker, *a lethal combination of hunky looks, deep blue eyes and humble attitude*, not to mention his creativity and innovative project completion skills. He cared for everyone from his heart, a selfless attitude that made him retain his position of power and authority for long. All the employees working under him were very happy and felt contented with their job and responsibilities shared.

When an airplane accident killed his wife and young boy 2 years ago, his world toppled and his soul crumbled to pieces, pieces which were lost forever. *They were the only family he had!!* All his colleagues tried to comfort him in all the ways they could, but he kept living somewhere in his past, a past which he wished every second to re-live and make it as his present!

His friend Sushil was different than his other friends. The only words he spoke were, “Come, let’s go for a walk, Kunal,” but never said more than that. In the beginning, the noise their shoes made while treading on *the dry leaves scattered in Inayat Park would hide the silence of Kunal’s abysmal emptiness and the screaming silences that would surface up, often ending up with his deep blue eyes tainted to a reddish hue.*

One day, Kunal suddenly came to a halt, pointed his nose up trying to catch the smell in the air.

“Can you smell that?” he asked. The expression on his face changed resembling the sweet innocence of a child.

“It’s the smell of peanuts. Come on, let’s go! Let’s have some..,” he added running forward and often backward to see if Sushil is keeping his pace with him too. It was the first time after the news of accident that Sushil saw Kunal blissful.

They came up to this street-side vendor at the corner of the Inayat Park and a poor woman was boiling peanuts and spicing it up with mango pieces, spices and mixing it with fresh lemon juice. The sweet sour smell and the colour kindoff virtually enhanced the flavour and the desire to have those peanuts. A young boy, probably her son, surrounded by his friends couldn’t stop filling the boiling peanuts

in newspaper rolls to offer them to waiting buyers. "Peanuts for two, please," said Kunal tending him some money with an unexpected smile. He took the money, gave him two sets rolled in a newspaper cone and watched Sushil and Kunal as they began marching on. A few feet away, Kunal stopped, turned back and started walking toward the burning stove.

"Wait! Did you notice the children?" he asked Sushil.

"Yea, so what about them?" said Kunal.

"Look at their faces. Can't you see they are expecting something special to happen?"

"Like what?"

"Like free peanuts??? Come, let's go and make it happen."

He returned to the street-side vendor lady, Sushil following him, rolled out his money and said, "Peanuts for all the children."

They all gathered around him each one trying to get the first bag of nuts screaming their joy out "Me, me..." although realizing they would each have their turn. "Whoa!!.. okay, all of you line up. Everyone will surely have one," Kunal said.

It just had to be seen! It was so beautiful to watch. As they pulled in line, the vendor's son would hand the bags to Sushil who passed them on to Kunal who in turn gave each child a cone filled with boiled and spiced peanuts.

"You know, Sushil, I deeply feel we should do the same thing with our colleagues' kids at the office."

That was how it all began some 10 years ago. Ever since, Kunal and Sushil would visit the Inayat Park and would see an almost mile long line form and grow up, through the years. Then he would organize an even more heartwarming celebration on Diwali nights for the children of those he worked with in his office.

Each year, Kunal would come up with a unique and a novel idea which would surprise everyone, more than that, it would make

everyone happy. Prakruthi and her son were always there to help knowing quite well, not because they were making, in one single night, more money they could have earned in weeks, but that it had turned the *usual day into an unusual day* — Kunal's Peanut Day, a day they couldn't miss. It gave them a new meaning to what they did during Diwali and even more for Sushil, whose friendship with Kunal grew stronger.

However, no one, not even Sushil, *expected things would be different this year or will this unexpected turn off things mould to something even more better?*

They went for lunch at their usual place, this old Iranian style restaurant Kunal had found which had been restored God knows how many times, but managed to preserve its original look and feel and above all *the taste which was its identity*.

“So, how are things being planned out for this year's Kunal's Peanuts Day?” Sushil asked as they sat down and looked at the menu-card. “We only have a month to go and you haven't sent me any cue yet.”

Kunal didn't respond and, by that, Sushil knew somewhere the puzzle pieces didn't fit together.

“Maybe... we should go for a walk.” Sushil added. “You know, the ‘boiling peanuts spiced up with spices’ —kind of walk we had years ago, Shall we?”

Kunal quickly understood Sushil's clue.

“They're sending me at the Head-Office up North.”

“What? Who? Why?”

“The Board of Directors are sending me to the North. So, I'll be leaving tomorrow morning.”

“When will you return?”

“No idea, Sushil.”

“Don’t they know what you’ve been doing for the employees children all these past years?”

“They said they had no choice. They couldn’t even tell me what I’ll be doing! Only that the President of the Company told them to do so or else...” “He must be thinking Diwali is just another day in the year.”

This time, Sushil didn’t know what to do or say for Kunal’s world was crumbling down a second time and again, his soul was very much a connected part of it. No words could express each of their anguish and after finishing their lunch, they returned to the office... they returned emotionally numb.

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