



I look in every direction before racing away from the stalls, heading out of the market towards a sign for the train station.

The sun bakes the back of my head and I think of Ma, who will be busy with the twins or cooking by now. She'll probably be making my favourite spiced egg bread that I cover in oozing honey from our own hives. She won't go to light the deeva until

later, so she won't have seen my second note yet. She'll think I'm on the mountainside, or tending the cows, not here in the middle of Sonahaar, running away from home.

I begin to cross the chaotic road towards a neem tree in the middle of an island with traffic blaring all around it, the air thick and smoky.

Taxis beep at meandering cows and a rickshaw driver nearly drives straight over me. When I reach the island at last, I leap towards the tree, clinging to it and wiping the sweat off my face.

On the opposite pavement is an old stone building with a sign above the wide double doors: *Sonahaar Railway Station*.

I launch myself back into the road until I'm right by the doorway, where two dogs skulk, their heads low to the ground, chewing on scraps of paratha that some kind passenger has thrown to them.

I hope I don't come back as a dog after I die, having to beg for my food. Our holy teachings say you never know what animal you might become in your next life. I think of Nanijee and the lamagaia in the garden and wonder if it really was her.

I push the enormous doors open and step into a huge echoing hall with a high glass ceiling, full of people carrying heavy suitcases and immense bundles of luggage on their heads.

Hundreds of noisy sparrows fly from side to side, bickering and pecking at the ground.

I see straight away that the hall is filled with police and keep my eyes lowered, turn briefly to check that no one is following me, and edge myself into the crowds. I'm swept along towards the far end of the hall with everyone else and stare blankly at a tall board with a list of place names I've only ever seen on a map or in Geography lessons. I know I need to get to Galapoor, but I can't find it anywhere.

Even though it's sweltering in here, I feel too shy to pull my hood down, but my head is getting hotter and my thoughts spin around me in confusing spirals. Perhaps I need to find a train that's going towards the High Himalayas and stops at Galapoor or perhaps there's another board in another part of the station.

I squat on the ground with my back against a cool pillar, trying to work out what I should do as I stare at the list of destinations again. I'm begrudgingly grateful for Jeevan's map now and get it out, spread it on the ground and find all the places that he measured and marked in different colours.

Compared to mine, his is so detailed. His numbers are a messy scrawl but I can see he's written that it's 400 miles to Zandapur from here and I feel my anger flash again as I think of his betrayal and cowardice for letting me do this all by myself.

I'm still studying the map when I get a strange feeling that someone is watching me. I peer around the pillar into the crowded hall but can't figure out who it might be. Maybe Jeevan's papa found out and went to the police; there are plenty of them about. My heart clatters noisily against my ribs.

I yank my hood forwards, trying to bring it as close to my face as I can, and move towards the busier part of the station, keeping my head lowered.

I sense someone close behind me and I get ready to sprint, but a hand on my shoulder stops me.

I twist round. Is it the police? 'Leave me alone!' I shout, ready to defend myself as best I can.

'Asha . . . Is that you?'

I can't believe it . . . a tight knot forms in my throat. 'Jeevan! What are you doing here?' I push back my hood to take a proper look at him.

'I've been looking for you for ages. I wasn't sure it

was you.'

'So there was someone watching me!'

'I thought and thought about it.' He twists at his friendship band. 'And in the end I couldn't let you go by yourself . . . so when my papa was busy I came to find you.'

I hurl my arms around him, hugging him as tightly as I can.

Jeevan turns beetroot, waves his arms around to stop himself from toppling over and clears his throat. 'I'm sorry I let you down,' he says quietly.

'I know how hard it must have been,' I say. 'But you came in the end and that's all that matters now.'

A little frown appears between his eyebrows and I know he's thinking about what he's done, wondering how his papa will explain it to his ma when he gets home. 'After I watched you leave, I kept imagining

all the dangers out here,' says Jeevan. 'And I couldn't let you face them all alone. It'll be like that book we read at school, *The Three Musketeers*. "All for one and one for all."' "

'There's only two of us,' I say, laughing for the first time in ages. 'In case you haven't noticed.' Now that he's here, I feel a fresh surge of energy. 'How do you like my new look?' I redden as I pass my hand over my clipped hair. Jeevan hasn't said anything yet.

'It looks . . . different,' he says. 'In a sort-of interesting way, like a proper pilgrim.' He smiles.

'Or a warrior,' I add.

He suddenly starts to pace. 'Let's go, my papa's probably noticed that I've gone. He might be looking for us and I'm sure he'll go to the police.'

We push ourselves into the crowds of people waiting on the platform.

'We have to find a train that will drop us at Galapoor,' I say.

'Ask someone. Look for a friendly face.' Jeevan glances towards the doors.

'What about him?' I point at the first person that catches my eye.

He jumps in before I can say anything. 'Excuse me, my ma wants to know which train goes into the High Himalayas from here.'

'We need to get to Galapoor,' I add.

The man points at the busy board. 'It's the one that's going to Shimbala in half an hour,' he says, looking us up and down. 'Going for the fresh mountain air are you, you and your brother?' He nods at me as he says 'brother'.

'Yes,' says Jeevan quickly.

My cheeks feel red, but I'm pleased my short hair is fooling people. 'Thank you,' I say, smiling.

We walk away quickly and head towards the buzzing platform.

'I can't believe that man thought you were a boy,' says Jeevan, elbowing me. 'He must be half blind.'

I shrug. 'It just means the disguise is working.'

'Anyway, how are we going to get on?' asks Jeevan, changing the subject. 'I didn't bring any money.'

I look in my purse. 'I haven't got much and definitely not enough for two train tickets. We'll have to sneak on. There are so many people they might not check.'

All over the platform, frightening-looking guards in dark uniforms order the crowds about, directing them to trains, taking tickets, working through the chaos.

Jeevan's eyes widen as he watches them. 'Those guards have got batons. What happens if we get caught?'

'I don't know,' I say, making tight fists. 'But I know we have to try and get on that train.'

Questions from Chapter 11

For discussion only – no need to write anything down

1. What sacrifice has Asha made at the end of the last chapter, Chapter 10?
2. What dish was Asha imagining her mum making for her? Have you ever eaten anything like that?
3. What is the name of the train station Asha is trying to get to?
4. What does Asha see that makes her hope she won't come back in her next life as a dog?
5. Asha's map was destroyed when it fell into a puddle. What is she using as a map now?
6. Asha had been furious with Jeevan. How does she react when she sees him?
7. Why did Jeevan change his mind about going with Asha?
8. What is their destination and which train do they need to catch to get there?
9. Asha and Jeevan don't have enough money to buy train tickets. How have they planned to get onto the train?



GLOSSARY

OF HINDI AND PUNJABI WORDS

BARFI – A sweet treat made with condensed milk. A bit like fudge.

BETAY – Dear (term of endearment for a child).

BUTA – An ancient floral symbol shaped a little like a teardrop.

CHAI – Spiced sugary tea.

CHAPPAL, CHAPPALA – Simple sandals a bit like flip-flops.

CHUNI – A long scarf worn by women, usually to match an outfit.

DEEVA, DEEVAY – A small clay pot filled with oil and a wick, similar to a tea light.

DHABBA STALL – A roadside stall selling freshly cooked food.

DHAL – Soup made with lentils.

DHOSA, DHOSAY – Rice-batter pancake cooked on a griddle and stuffed with a spiced potato filling.

DHOTI – A cloth worn by men instead of trousers. You wrap the cloth round the waist and the final section is passed through the legs and tucked into the waist-band.

DIVALI – The festival of lights celebrated all over India and by Hindus around the world, based on the story of Rama and Sita. Candles are lit, fireworks set off and presents exchanged. The festival is also part of the Sikh religion, where it celebrates the release of Guru Gobind Singh from prison.

DIVALI MUBARAK – Happy Divali.

JELAYBIE, JELAYBIA – An orange spiral-shaped sweet treat. It's crunchy on the outside and filled with liquid sugar.

KABADI – A traditional Indian sport, a bit like rugby without the ball.

KURTA – A knee-length tunic worn over trousers.

LASSI – Drink made with fresh yoghurt, water and ice.

LENGHA – A long pretty skirt usually worn for special occasions.

MAHOUT – A person who looks after elephants.

NAAN – Soft white-flour flatbread cooked in a tandoor oven.

NAMASTE – 'Hello' in Hindi.

PAAN – A red Leaf from the betel tree, chewed like tobacco.

PAISA, PAISAY – An Indian currency unit, similar to pence in the UK. One hundred paisay make a rupee.

PAKORA, PAKORAY – Fried potato and onion savoury snack made with chickpea flour.

PANEER – Soft cheese cooked with peppers, onions and tomatoes.

PARATHA – layered wholewheat flatbread filled with potato and smothered in butter.

ROTI, ROTIA – a flatbread made with wholewheat flour and cooked on a griddle, similar to a Mexican tortilla.

RUPEE – The currency of India.

SHUKRIAA – Thank you.

TANDOOR – Clay oven used to cook naan, as well as chicken and other meats.

TAVA – Griddle.

THALI, THALIA – Stainless-steel tray with compartments for different dishes.

TULSI – Holy basil herb.

YAAR – A friendly way to refer to a man, similar to 'mate'.

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