

Bollywood and the Beast (an excerpt)

BY **SULEIKHA SNYDER**

There was a map of scar tissue, both burns and cuts, across much of his left side from how he'd been pinned inside the wreckage of the sleek Italian sports car. Would she follow the trail, thinking to heal his hurts with her hands? Her lips? Taj knew such a journey was folly.

As if she read his mind, she came round to stand in front of him. Her toffee-brown eyes focused on the small scrap of skin bared by the open collar of his *kurta*. "I'm not naïve," she reminded him. "I don't think I can kiss your boo-boos and make them better. Only you can do that."

He laughed again, deliberately dismissing her psychobabble. "Kiss myself? Circus freak I may be, but I am not a contortionist, Rakhee."

The toffee melted from the sudden flare of heat in her eyes. She was genuinely angered by his words. "I said stop it. Don't ever talk about yourself that way again. It's not sexy."

"Oh...because I am so very concerned with my sex appeal?" he scoffed.

She didn't blink, only followed his mockery with her own. "Aren't you? I have the beard burn to prove it."

He shifted in the chair. "Your mouth is too bold."

"And yours is too dirty," she instantly volleyed, hands set smartly on her hips. "No wonder they fit together so well."

He couldn't disagree. Not when the sense memory of kissing her was so fresh, so immediate. The taste of her, the feel...how she never backed down from his challenges, only met them and pushed him further. No one had matched him like Rocky. Not even his ex, Archana, who was now but a flimsy recollection in the darkest corners of his mental vault.

"Oh my God. Don't tell me I've struck you silent." Rocky stepped back, theatrically clutching at her chest. "The Great Taj Ali Khan...bested at last? By me? A mere American-born, confused *desi*?"

"Never." He rolled the chair forward, catching her by the elbow and tugging her off-balance, tumbling her into his lap. The smile she gave him was pure feminine triumph. And the kiss? Deliciously, aching tender. Now she'd bested him.

For Taj couldn't keep her at a distance when she was so close. He could not worry about the consequences when all he wanted to do was take action. He couldn't give thought to tomorrow when they had this moment between them. Her mouth demanded. Her hands took. Sliding down his chest and below his *kurta*...exploring the ruined terrain of his chest. She called him "beautiful" when she undid the fastenings of his trousers and dove into the gap.

"Rakhee...Rakhee, *tehro*," he gasped, trying to stop her fingers, only to be batted away like an annoyance.

"You're sexy," she whispered, shifting so her legs were draped over the arms of his chair. So they were lewdly, intimately, entwined. "You're sexy and you're infuriating and you're mine. For as long as you'll let me be."

"What if I...I can't?" It was a baseless argument, because already his cock was rising to the occasion, swelling against her palm.

"Then you use your mouth. Isn't that what you suggested when we first met?" Draped across him, over him, her hair spilling over him like a silk *dupatta*, she was an erotic vision almost too vibrant for his one pathetic eye. The tease of her kiss-damp pink lips, the anger in her gaze replaced by lust...Rocky was too much. Rocky was everything. "I'm not a virgin, Taj," she said, as always utterly brazen. "This isn't my first ride."

"It feels like mine," he admitted softly. He looped an arm around her waist and gingerly rose from the wheelchair, steadying her with one hand curled into her hair and gripping almost tight enough to be vengeful. Almost. For he didn't want to punish anyone but himself. After this was long over...when it was just another hazy memory to add to his trove. "You're my first, Rakhee. My only. In this new life, I've only ever had you."

He spoke in Hindi, but she had learned enough to understand. Perhaps she'd understood him all along.

They stumbled together to the bench seat in the arbor. An awkward tangle of mouths and limbs, of scars and smoothness. He'd once cloaked himself in shadows here, but now he stripped bare for her.

She wasn't a virgin. That much was true. But this was hardly in the same category as anything she'd experienced after the prom or a set-striking party. Impulsive, wild, frantic groping under the shelter of exotic trees and hanging vines. Seducing a man over ten years older than her. Whispering "I love you" and meaning it. Taj made the impossible seem possible. He turned the unthinkable into the spoken and the done.

Rocky straddled his lap, her skirt hiked above her knees and the sun-warmed wooden bench marking patterns into her skin. Taj shucked his shirt and tossed it aside with defiance, as if even now he was daring her to cringe, to pull away, to run. *Not a chance*. She kissed the jagged scars down the side of his throat and every pale burn that ran down his chest. It was just like his face...the combination of pain and perfection. As if the hand of fate had chosen to strike only one side, leaving the other as a reminder of what he used to be. And it didn't matter. Because she cherished both equally, touched both equally.

"You can't scare me, Taj. Don't even try."

He rubbed his jaw against her cheek and then turned to catch her earlobe between his teeth and tug. "How can I, sweet Rakhee, when you are scaring me?"

He was shivering under her hands. But not from fear.

"We should not," he said, even as his body told her differently.

She answered it by stroking the hard length of his cock, by rocking into him, already slick and needy and desperate to be rid of her panties. "We can." Her voice was thick, almost foreign. Like she'd learned one more new language in the time between waking up this morning and bending close to whisper, "I have an IUD. Mom took me to get it two years ago and didn't tell Dad."

"Speaking of your father is not..." He gasped as her fingers tightened, but it quickly turned into a scowl and his own grip digging into her hips. "It is not incentive, sweet Rocky. And it is *not* sexy."

She had to laugh at having her words thrown back at her. Taj was learning to play. Learning to *love* playing. And she would teach him every game she knew, if only he'd give her the chance to. "You want incentive? Help me take off my clothes."

Retired or not, he still took direction like a pro. He pushed her dress up, making the slide slow and torturous. "Like this, Rakhee?" His hands, so large and capable, nearly spanned her ribcage, and his thumbs stroked up to the border of her bra and pushed

beneath. "And this?" They unhooked it together, and she leaned back so he could pull both her bra and her dress over her head and fling them aside. Maybe they landed in a tree. Or on a hedge. She didn't care. All that mattered was how he looked at her. How he leaned in to taste and to lick.

Rocky threaded her fingers through his hair, trying, like he had, not to pull too hard. But when he set his lips to her nipple and his teeth joined in, it was too much. Her blood roared in her veins, slammed against her eardrums. Just like that, she was hotter and wetter than Mumbai in the rainy season, wrapped in smoke and dust and wanting nothing more than to be drenched to the bone. And Taj, the beautiful beast, didn't let up. His fingers joined in on the storm, diving down the front of her panties and moving in counterpoint to his wicked mouth.

She came quickly, *too* quickly, clawing at him and keening and forgetting speech altogether. She felt his smile against her skin, smug and satisfied, and tasted his victory when he raised his wet fingers for her to suck clean.

"Rakhee." Her name rumbled like thunder as he kissed his way from the slope of her breast to her throat to her jaw and then her lips. "*Mere* Rakhee. Mine."

Yes. His. His first. His only. She wanted it all to be true.

His cock was impossibly hard and already primed for her. She rose up just enough to shimmy out of her underwear and kick it down to her ankles. And then they were fitting together, locking into place, slick and needy and wild. The angle was a little off, their rhythm not quite right, and the bench rocked in discordant bangs and thumps. Taj kissed her like he was starving for it, and she kissed him back like her passion could sustain him for a year. Rocky had never, *ever* felt so goddamn good, so complete...and so much like she was home. With him. *Only* with him.

It wasn't a curse at all.

It was a blessing.

Excerpted from Chapter Twenty-One of *Bollywood and the Beast*. ©Suleikha Snyder, Samhain Publishing, February 11, 2014.

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