



## The Baby Bump

### Fatema Mustafa Chhatriwala

She was shopping groceries at the nearby grocery store when she felt a gaze on her. When she looked in the direction, she realised that the gaze was in plural. There were three women looking and pointing towards her and talking in quick low whispers.

She quickly takes her necessities and skips strolling around the way she usually does. The grocery store and the park nearby are the only places she could go for such strolls. She hurriedly pays the amount and leaves the store as soon as she could. She takes a deep breath of fresh air as soon as she gets

out of the store as if she was getting suffocated inside. People's gaze always made her feel that way.

She starts walking slowly and steadily upwards, towards her house far up on the hilly road. Every time she went grocery shopping, the most difficult thing was going back home with all the bags in her hand and a protruding belly with twins.

She must have been half way up when she saw four pair of eyes looking at her. The ladies of the neighbourhood were pointing towards her and speaking in a tone that was tried to be low but was loud enough for her to hear, "I have never seen this girl in the neighbourhood before. Who is she?" The short and plump lady among the four asks to the other three.

"You don't know?" The lady with a light moustache and three hair of beard visible in daylight on her chin asks surprised. She continues saying, "She just moved to the neighbourhood. She is from Mumbai. She just moved in in the studio up the hill, all alone. No family, no husband. There are rumours of all kinds about her pregnancy. Some people are saying that she is a prostitute. She got pregnant and got ousted from her kind."

"Yes. And then some are saying that she seduced her boyfriend and got intimate with him. When she got pregnant, she was dumped by her boyfriend and thrown out by her family." Says the fourth lady who was wearing clothes so bright it could have dimmed the sunlight. She said in a hush tone as Namrata came nearer.

"Some are saying she had a husband who threw her out because she got pregnant with another man's child." The third lady says quickly eager to participate in the conversation as Namrata walks past them and they get back to their normal voices.

Namrata, a normal girl living a normal life, was now pregnant with not one but two kids. Her hand instinctively goes to her belly and she gently starts rubbing it. She couldn't believe she is stuck in a neighbourhood where people love gossiping,

especially about her since the day she moved in the studio on the hill.

She reaches home, tired, exhausted and irritated of climbing the hill and from people's judgemental looks and listening to their gossips. Finally sitting on the second hand sofa-cum-bed which was the only furniture in the room apart from the side table with a lamp, she feels at ease.

She closes her eyes and lets the exhaustion and irritation out by taking deep breaths. As her irritation and anger calms down, a tear falls from her still closed eyes.

People in the neighbourhood loved gossiping about her. There were so many rumours circulating around about her but they were so far from the truth.

Only she knew what had happened the night she got pregnant. Only she knew the pain she went through.

Tears flood out as she remembers what happened that night.

Namrata, a 21 year old artist with several recognitions on her name. She lived in Mumbai, the land of opportunities and the place where people recognised and valued all forms of art.

It was second year anniversary of her and Rishi's relationship. Rishi had planned a surprise for her at his place. She went to his place in the evening not intending to stay later than 9.00.

After a beautiful romantic evening, the night turned to a nightmare.

"It is 8.00 and an hour to go before this romantic evening comes to an end." She told Rishi with a little sad tone to her voice.

"Here. Relax. We still have an hour." Rishi gave her a glass of orange juice with a smile as he enjoyed his champagne.

That is where everything went wrong.

After having a large gulp of orange juice, she felt weird. Everything was little blur and her limbs were too weak to move but conscious enough to know what was going on.

She was drugged.

Rishi looked at her not with the eyes of her prince charming of fairy tales but villain to her real life. He moved the flick of hair from her face and took her to his bed.

She was too numb to feel anything. She couldn't believe what was happening but her body betrayed to form the strength to stop him and all that her body was able to do was form tears in her eyes.

She was raped. He drugged her, raped her and slept beside her exhausted sated with his work.

After an hour of dizziness the effect of the drug on her wears off. She gets up and pulls Rishi up to his feet and yells and slaps him while he smiles not having an ounce of regret to what he just did.

Her imagination of his proposal seemed too farfetched now. He never intended to marry her.

The truth had not just broken her heart but had wounded her soul and broken her belief in love and trust.

The people of the neighbourhood had no idea how difficult it was, not just what she had been through that evening but everything after as well. She started seeing a psychiatrist soon after and when her period was late the doctor advised her to take a pregnancy test which came positive. At first, she intended to abort the child but when she went for her first check-up she was told there were two heartbeats. Twins! She couldn't do it. She couldn't bring herself to murder not one but two kids who weren't even born. Her own blood. She stayed with her parents for the first five months who didn't have any idea what was going on with her.

She left home as the sixth month started after leaving a note to her parents telling them the whole truth to spare them the embarrassment. They call her every day to convince her to come back home but she has stayed firm on her decision so far.

She came here to this town near Shimla, far away from her home, where she researched were enough medical facilities for having a healthy delivery and cheap medical costs as well.

"Today starts the ninth month." She thinks as she wipes her tears. She rubs her belly with all the love and says, "Whatever happened, whatever he did, was not your fault. I loved him with all my heart and you are the proof of not his betrayal but the love and trust I had on him. I love you okay."

She smiles to her belly as she goes to the stove and makes herself food.



## **Fatema Mustafa Chhatrivwala**

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Fatema is a passionate wordsmith with an insatiable appetite for storytelling and a keen eye for the profound in the ordinary. Hailing from Mumbai, Fatema has journeyed through life with a pen in hand, documenting the beauty and complexity of the world around them. A reader, a dreamer and a believer, she believes in making her dreams come true.

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