

The Secrets Of Meera by Flameillumination Chapter 8

She stood in front of the big, beautiful, green building. The name of the building ‘Vision’ had green leaves protruding from it. She looked closely and realized that the sign was a standing letter garden. The exterior sign was made of wood designed to look like letters and had countless tiny flowerpots in it. When she entered the building, she found the entire walls of the entrance space covered with standing gardens. The roof had hanging pots dangling from it in place of chandeliers. The spiral stairs had indoor plants in flowerpots on every alternate stair. The complete building looked like a verdant, thick rainforest. The atmosphere was absolutely pristine, serene, and exotic.

She approached the reception and informed, “Hi! I am here for my appointment with Daniel Westside.”

A spectacled man sitting behind the desk looked at her, smiled, and asked, “May I have your name please?”

“My name? Just look for an appointment with Mr Daniel Westside for this morning. I am sure I am in your system.”

“Yes, there is an appointment scheduled but I need your name to cross-check it, ma’am.”

“Ms Meera Thakur?” A giant, bulky man with stoic features dressed in an elegant charcoal suit approached her.

“Mr Daniel westside?” Asked Meera.

“Yes.” He put his hand forward to greet her with a handshake.

“Oh, it is nice to meet you.” She took his hand and shook it.

“Likewise. Please come with me.” He gestured towards the stairs, and she followed him. He noticed the big white bandage on her arm and asked, “Um... Are you ok?”

“I am sorry,” she sounded confused.

“You are hurt.” He said pointing in the direction of her arm.

“Oh, that, it’s nothing, just a small cut.”

“Quite a big bandage for a small cut.”

“Yes, it’s a gift from your boss,” she mumbled.

“Pardon?”

“Nothing, I just said this building is beautiful, it’s so green,” she turned her head and looked around in awe.

“This is a green building,” he said.

“Yes, I can see that.”

“No, it’s a green building,” he emphasized.

“You mean this is a sustainable building, environmentally responsible and all,” she sounded surprised and impressed.

“Yes.” He said with a hint of pride in his voice.

“Wow!”

“Would you like a tour?” He offered as they kept climbing the stairs.

“Absolutely.”

“This building is the brainchild of our CEO, Arthur Guild. He wanted a building that would create a positive impact on climate and the environment, so he worked closely with our construction department and created this masterpiece. We even achieved a LEED certification because of his designs in the building.”

“What?”

“Yes, he is a civil engineer.”

“I did not know that.”

“Very few people know about that. People just are aware of his MBA from GIT, but he also has an engineering degree from there. He spent a good amount of his adult life in Guild Institute of Technology.”

“Oh,” she exclaimed.

“The building materials used are recycled stones, recycled metal, rapidly renewable plant material, and all the furniture in this office premises are made up of non-toxic, reusable, renewable, and recyclable material,” he explained.

“But what about water for so many plants. Is that not an issue?” She asked curiously.

“The structure of this building is ideal for rainwater harvesting. He designed this edifice by keeping the conservation of water in mind, so it has self-sufficient water, and we are independent of the city municipal system. We have ultra-low flush bathrooms. Bidets are installed in every toilet thus completely eliminating the use of toilet paper. The water from

washrooms is recycled and carried through narrow bamboo straws, which you can see is attached to our roof if you look closely.”

“That’s impressive.” She looked up and saw a complicated network of bamboo straws running on the roof and stairs.

“Not only that, but the building is also facing true south, and the rooftop of the building is at an inclination of 20 degrees. So, the solar thermal panels on the roof generate the electricity needed for the entire structure. We keep all our windows open at the maximum tilt and the cross breeze and these green plants keep our office cool and fresh. Not a single AC is installed inside the premises. Do you see the glasses in the windows and railings?” He was completely immersed in praising his building and giving her a proper tour.

“Yes.”

“Every single piece of glass is recycled. Not one chunk of plastic is used in the construction of this building. We also have a sewage processing system. We are thinking of installing a wind turbine in the future.”

“I think you have achieved full marks in dealing with environmental issues under CSR.”

“Ha-ha. Yes, now we must focus on other issues and initiatives.” His stoic face showed a glimpse of happiness but reverted to its original expression in an instant.

“I hear you,” she replied.

They climbed a flight of stairs and her eyes widened with the picture in front of her. The entire floor was decorated in bright colours in beautiful patterns. An art piece in form of a gaming sword was installed at the entrance. There were no cubicles, the entire floor had an open concept.

At the other end of the floor, there was a basketball hoop mounted in the wall. Few cosplay dresses were displayed all around the floor.

Daniel clarified, “in front of you is the new department, Gaming Industry, we have the plan to expand it into a full-fledged IT industry if this venture is successful.”

“It’s so lively and colourful,” she said.

“Yes, you, millennials, and Gen Z want your atmosphere to be fun and colourful.”

“So true.” She smiled at him, and they moved forward.

“This floor and two floors above are the health and beauty department.”

They then moved to the topmost floor.

“This is the CR department. Let’s go to my cabin.” The entire floor had 10 large offices and two huge conference rooms. The largest office in the east of the floor had the name plaque on which the ‘Director of Corporate Responsibility’ was engraved.

A huge room painted in sky blue colour covered with plants welcomed her. The room was breezy and had a soothing earthy smell. They both sat down, and Daniel looked at her and started the discussion.

“Would you like some refreshments?” He asked.

“No, thank you. Let’s talk about our business.”

“Ok. We would like you to...” he started telling her about his plans, but she cut him off.

“Sorry to interrupt but before we talk shop, I have a few questions,” she intruded.

“Please ask away,” he answered humbly.

“Why Spriha?” She asked intriguingly.

“You approached us first,” he replied.

“You put out the feelers in the world, so we approached you. What I don’t understand is why you said yes in just one phone call,” she asked suspiciously.

“Well, we researched you and we CSR people know about the fast-rising good name of Spriha. Your NGO’s work with United Nations and work in Africa, India, the UK, Singapore, and many more countries are well known. The amazing work you did with the homeless people of India is inspiring,” he sounded genuinely impressed.

“But you have a lot of well-established NGOs in the US, why not work with them, why you want to work with us?” She was still not ready to believe him.

“Let me be frank. Presently, Spriha has the best public image among NGOs in the whole world. The way you guys use social media for your benefit is amazing and we want to cash in on that,” he answered shamelessly.

“What’s in it for us?”

“Name it and you will have it.”

“You can’t make that decision; your CEO has to say these exact words to me and then I will believe you,” she interjected.

“Trust me when I say this, CSR is my department and social responsibility is my expertise. He will do as I say.”

“I am sorry but as far as I know he decided to stop all the initiatives and projects and efforts. You did what he asked you to do not the other way around.”

“Well, it’s true but also not true.”

“Sorry ?”

“As you know company should spend a minimum of 2% of average net profits of three financial years. But our company saw a marginal decrease in profits year after year, which decreased our fun

ding for CSR. Lesser the profit, the lesser the funding. Due to a decrease in CSR efforts, our public image was tarnished, and consumers started favouring our competitors which further decreased our profits. Then a tragedy struck last year.”

“I am sorry, a tragedy ?” She asked innocently.

The moment she finished her question, a white smoke screen appeared again, and Alice floated out of it, again. She stood behind Daniel and spoke in her usual vibrating tone, “oh look at you trying to act oblivious as if you don’t know what tragedy he is talking about.”

“Shut up,” she muttered under her breath and closed her eyes for a few seconds in hope that Alice would vanish.

“Did you say something?” Daniel asked bafflingly.

“No, please, you were about to tell me about a tragedy.” She was trying hard not to look at Alice who was standing right behind Daniel and hovering her hands over his head trying to touch his hair.

“My death, which you are here to help me with,” she taunted Meera and stuck her tongue out to attract her attention. Meera kept looking at everything else except Alice.

“Our CEO lost his fiancé,” said Daniel.

“How? An accident?” Asked Meera. Alice climbed and suspended on Daniel’s desk and lay on her side, arm angled upwards with her head propped on her hand.

“Oh no, it was a murder. She was shot.”

“She knows, she is making a fool out of you, Daniel,” screamed Alice.

“Oh yes, I remember I read about it in papers.” Meera was still trying to avoid Alice’s gaze, so she was staring directly at Daniel’s face. Alice switched her position and was now lying on her stomach, hovering, and trying to touch things kept on Daniel’s desk but being a spectral being she was unable to touch anything. Seeing Alice’s stupidity, Meera rolled her eyes, hard.

“Yes, the papers, the media coverage of the news brought further downfall. It destroyed our brand value. CSR was close to her heart. Many of our initiatives were her ideas. She was supposed to be named as our new CFO, but everything went wrong. They were supposed to get married in a month after that. So, when she died, Arthur ordered us to stop everything till the police finds her murderer. But it has been a year

and we cannot keep ignoring our social duty. So, we decided to restart our efforts.”

“You mean she was about to become a CFO and then, wife of Arthur Guild.” She tried to sound surprised to avoid suspicion.

“Yes.”

“I hope her killers are behind bars.”

“Why are you asking him about the things that you already know?” Said Alice and moved towards Meera. Meera was on the edge of her seat ready to bolt out of the door the moment the meeting finishes.

“Sadly no, the police are still looking for her killer,” said Daniel. Alice stood behind Meera.

“Oh, that’s bad,” she said jumpily.

“I know.”

“No! That’s bad for your public image. One of your high-profile people died and no one knows who killed her. Maybe your company is involved in something shady? Should I be concerned?” She controlled her fear and explained.

“What? No!” He sounded defensive.

“So, if my company works with yours, we will have no negative impact on our name,” she emphasized for an answer.

“If you say yes, we will operate jointly as separate entities under JV, the risk factor will be minimum. I know you don’t need us as much as we

need you. But this JV will ensure your entry into the US. Soon you can become global.”

She took a deep breath as Alice was playing with Meera’s ponytail. After composing herself she asked, “which issues do you want us to focus on?”

“We would like you to help us with human rights and educational issues.”

“But as you said, you have limited funding,” she said while hitting on Alice’s hand that was playing with her hair.

“Good point, I was about to invite you.”

“Excuse me!”

“We organize a masquerade ball every year and raise funds for our CSR programmes. We didn’t do it last year but as we are restarting everything, so we restarted the ball too. This year’s funding will be utilized for our Labour Initiative.”

Alice was now in Meera’s face.

“What is that?” She waved her hand frantically pretending to swat a fly which made Alice transform back into a puff of smoke. Meera sighed with relief.

“I am glad you asked, the labourers working in small-scale industries and independent labourers are provided housing projects, health benefits, education for their kids, and skill development for them,” he explained.

“That’s a noble cause. Ok, let me talk to my board of directors and ask my project managers to look for projects in your preferred issue and we can then discuss further.”

“It means you are going to work with us,” he said happily.

“It depends on what my board says. You also need to hire a PR team.”

“Who do you think gave us the idea of working with an NGO?” He smirked.

“Oh, the secret is out.”

“Ha-ha, I hope your board says yes.” His lips turned up at the corners and his stoic face somehow displayed a smile.

“I will try to make this JV work, Mr Westside.”

“Thank you, Ms Thakur. So, are you coming to the ball?”

“Of course, I love to party.”

“Then it’s done I will see you tomorrow evening.” He stood up, came to her, and offered his hand.

“Sure.” She took his hand shook it again.

“Let me walk you out.”

“Oh no, it’s fine. I will see myself out.”

She walked out of the cabin as fast as she could. No matter how fast she tried her fear caught up to her. A poof sound was followed by a cloud of white smoke and a vibrating voice.

“You cunning woman!” Said Alice.

“What the hell?” Meera held her heart in her hands and breathed heavily.

“Still scared,” Alice sounded annoyed.

“You used to visit me in my dreams, why have you started appearing when I am still awake? Also, why do you appear at most inappropriate times?” Meera whispered because others would call her crazy if they saw her talking to herself.

“You are wasting time,” said Alice angrily.

“I just can’t barge in, Alice. I need reasons and for creating reasons I need time.”

“Let’s hope you don’t run out of time,” she said and disappeared.

“You can’t just throw luxury at my feet to shut me up. I need answers. Hello!” Meera was pounding at the door and shouting at the top of her lungs.

“I told you, you would run out of time.” Alice’s voice reverberated all through the room.

“Will you shut up? I don’t need this right now. I am trying to talk to people outside, so I can’t talk to people inside, so SHUT UP,” shouted Meera.

Immediately, the door opened and both goons looked perplexed. They looked all around the room in bewilderment.

“Who are you talking to?” The short man asked.

“Ghost, who else?” She replied calmly.

“Boss didn’t tell us she is cuckoo,” the short man exchanged looks with the tall one and whispered.

“They didn’t believe you, morons. Do you want me to haunt them too?”
Asked Alice.

“Please, that will make me so happy,” said Meera while looking at her side where only she knew Alice was standing.

Both thugs stare at each other with fear.

“Why am I here? What is it that your boss wants?” Meera asked the kidnappers.

“He wants the whole world, and you are the first step,” said the tall man.

“What does that mean?”

“Our boss is going to burn the world and you handed him the match.”

“Enough with the riddles. If you can’t tell me who your boss is or what his plan is, at least tell me your names are.”

“Oh right, how rude of us. My name is Mike,” the tall man replied.

“And my name is none of your business,” said the short man.

“Nice name, idiot,” said Meera irritably.

“How dare you ?” The short man with a paunch moved forwards towards her but the tall man stopped him.

“Hey! Calm down.”

“Come on, I am never getting out of here. You can tell me your name. Who am I going to tell ? Moreover, how am I supposed to call you, Mike, and none of your business ?” Pleaded Meera.

“My name is Benjamin,” replied the short man.

“Thank you.”

“Now don’t shout, eat and rest. Stop talking to ghosts,” said Benjamin and both men left her alone.

“He is going to burn the world and I handed him the match, how am I ever going to figure it out ?”