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The windows were foggy. The early morning mist had set in. The view was refreshing, a welcome change from the sights of Madurai. The roads stretched out, solemn and abandoned; on the other side of it was the plunging ravine overlooking other quaint houses set on this hilly village. It all felt so removed from reality.

Nikki tried to blink the sleep away. Running her fingers through her hair, she gazed unfocusedly out the window. She didn't want to get up and pulled the blankets closer to her. Leaning back, she felt happy. There was no other way to define it. Kodaikanal made her happy.

She had a long day ahead of her. She had taken a one-year sabbatical from studies. She was going to stay with her aunt, Jonah (Joanna) Matthias and look for jobs either in Kodaikanal or elsewhere. She had just completed her Masters in English Literature and didn't feel inclined to take on further studies. Her aunt, a 52 year-old spinster, had agreed to let Nikki stay with her while she looked for jobs.

She had hardly done any work of yet. She didn't have a resume. She hadn't looked at the job columns in the newspaper or registered herself online. It had been ten days since she had left Madurai and she had still done nothing.

She was resolved to get something done that day. Fortunately for her, Jonah Matthias was one of those women you would find in an Agatha Christie novel. She potted about the kitchen and the garden, her chief hobby, all day. She hardly said a word and considered making small-talk a bother. She kept herself to herself and left Nikki well alone.

Jonah Matthias had made a name for herself in the college where she worked. Lean, tall and rather withered-looking, she was still one of the finest professors at her college. She was hard-working and sincere. She labored over books and scrupulously took down notes every day. And when she wasn't working on her lectures, she worked in her garden, weeding, tending, watering and mowing. She had never married and no one had tried to force her to marry either. She was a very good cook, being naturally good at whatever she did but she rarely found the energy to eat so she never cooked either. She could be difficult at times. She did not like to find that someone had removed or misplaced her things. She hated noise and wasn't at all good with children,

especially little children, the one thing she wasn't good at. Being decidedly anti-social, her family which now consisted of her two younger sisters, Ezhil and Mariah, had decided to leave her alone. The land and house she lived on had once belonged to her parents, Dr. Sahayam and Teresa Matthias. There she continued to live, having become an Archeology Professor in Brineswood, Kodaikanal College.

Life here was decidedly cozy. Nikki got up when she pleased, as early as 5 or as late as 9 and found some bread and lumpy but creamy salted butter on the table. There was a farmhouse of sorts nearby that delivered fresh eggs, deboned chicken and home-made pork sausages. All she had to do was call Kali, the young boy who ran errands for them and looked after their livestock. The cupboards were well stocked if she wanted anything else and anyway, there was a departmental store close-by. Carbonated drinks, unfortunately, were one of the pet peeves of Jonah and she detested to see anyone drink it so Nikki stayed away from them, though she occasionally missed kicking back on the sofa with a good Georgette Heyer novel, nachos and Coke, her favourite combination. Jonah did not read extra-curricular material but Nikki had brought her Kindle with her and read for hours at a time when the fancy took her. Jonah left very early and returned in the afternoon but Nikki was very careful as to displeasing her and stayed away from her things.

There was no internet. She usually watched TV, had a late, long, steaming hot shower and took her seat on the front porch. There was an adorable GSD cross-breed puppy nearby. Nikki was friendly to him and he often popped in. If her aunt wasn't in the house, she would take him in and play with him for some time. But the routine had become tired now. Nikki wasn't where she wanted to be in life. She had to come to terms with the fact. Her life was not as promising as that of her cousins who were doctors, engineers and very well-paid HRs. She was used to being dismissed easily but having so much time on her hands sometimes made her think. She often thought that she had made a mess of her life. She had once had so much potential, so much promise. She had thought she could find something absolutely stimulating. It was in such a daze that she had chosen to study literature but disillusionment soon set in. Reading literature meant veering away from her comfort zone. She was introduced to very complex symbolisms and schools of the thought and along the way; she had lost her love of reading. She read very little now and that too, only when she was forced to. She had been reading a single novel for two months now and was soon getting exhausted. Life held no more enchantment for her. Sometimes, she felt like she had nothing to offer, nothing to live for, even. Whenever these feelings surfaced, she buried herself in music. She would plug in her earphones and sit on the porch, lost in her own little world but nothing seemed to drive that emptiness away.