

# DEAD MEN DON'T PLAY

**SANJIB SINHA**



# Dead Men Don't Play

Vikram, PG and Motilal Mistry's Thriller Universe

Sanjib Sinha

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# Prologue

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# Chapter 1

**Sunday, 5:42 AM, Kolkata**

Peter slammed the brakes of his motorcycle so hard the tires screamed against the asphalt. He rattled off a string of the filthiest curses he knew, aiming them directly at the creature currently strolling across the street. The stray black cat paused, looked over its shoulder with absolute contempt, let out a pathetic *meow*, and vaulted onto a nearby wall to casually lick its paws.

“Move it, you little bastard,” Peter spat.

Out of sheer occupational superstition, he traced a quick cross over his chest, spat on the dirt, and sat idling. He wasn’t moving until a larger vehicle crossed his path to break the omen. Seconds later, a yellow taxi blurred past in the opposite direction. Omen broken.

Peter didn’t move the bike right away. Instead, he reached back, patting his heavy canvas rucksack. The money was still there. Under a layer of clothes sat thirty lakh rupees in crisp, thousand-rupee bundles. Five lakh up front, twenty-five on completion. Easy math, but a hell of a risk for one night’s work.

Feeling the reassuring bulge of the cash, he fished out his phone and hit Rahi’s number. It rang out.

He dialed again. Still nothing. Rahi was a notoriously light sleeper. Even in the middle of a session with a high-paying client, she always picked up Peter’s calls. It was a silent pact between them; Peter felt a surge of pride knowing that without her, he’d probably be rotting in a gutter by now.

“Come on, sleeping beauty,” Peter muttered, dropping the bike into gear.

He had left Grass’s place ten minutes ago and tried her number then, too. No answer. Overhead, the Kolkata sky was turning a bruised purple-black. If Peter had bothered to check the news, he would have known a two-day storm was rolling in.

Last night, Peter had been playing watchdog in the lavish lobby of Hotel Tamarind. Upstairs in a VIP suite, the twins—Rahi and Rahela—were playing a ‘doctor and nurse’ routine with Jackie Sen, an aging, half-dead mobster with

more money than functioning organs. But the bedroom games were just a smokescreen. Their *real* job had been something else entirely.

Peter twisted the throttle, pushing the bike faster. Why wasn't she answering? A knot of unease tightened in his gut. Was she sick?

When Jackie had finally passed out in a drunken stupor last night, Rahela had bailed. She had a flight to catch to Delhi, and Peter had booked her cab.

"Make sure you drop Rahi home safely," Rahela had ordered, her voice like crushed ice. "And get that old creep back to his house. Tell him dyeing his hair black doesn't make him a spring chicken."

Peter had thrown her a mock salute. "Don't worry, Didi. I've got this."

"Good. I'm leaving. Watch over her." Rahela's only weakness in this world was her twin sister. Peter knew it. As she rolled up the cab window, Peter had asked like an overbearing older brother, "When are you back?"

"Depends on what the idiot boy wants this time," she had replied, before the cab sped off into the night.

The 'idiot boy' was Manoj Tikka, a minister's son. A golden goose looting his father's corrupt empire to buy Rahela a penthouse in Dubai, begging her to marry him. Sitting in the Tamarind lobby, Peter had marveled at Rahela. He had seen a lot of girls in the Sonagachi red-light district, but Rahela defied all logic. Terrifyingly smart, breathtakingly beautiful, and completely devoid of human attachment—except for Rahi.

Peter slowed down as he approached a dangerous four-way intersection, snapping back to the present. He eased off the gas. No need to attract the uniforms lurking in the dawn shadows. If a cop pulled him over now, the thirty lakh was gone. Worse, they'd find the cold, hard iron tucked into the waistband of his jeans. Peter never rode without his piece; he had too many enemies. He had juice with the Sonagachi anti-vice squad, sure, but Sonagachi leverage meant nothing on the polished streets of New Town.

The twins had left the grime of Sonagachi years ago anyway. They had elite English-medium educations, flawless accents, and international clients. They talked about things like overseas 'swinger clubs'—concepts that went miles over Peter's head. The world was going to hell in a handbasket, but what did he care as long as he got his cut?

He turned onto the wide, quiet avenue of their luxury housing society in

New Town. It was the kind of ultra-posh high-rise where movie stars lived and neighbors never looked you in the eye. The perfect place to hide.

Peter killed the engine and coasted toward the gates, staring up at the darkened windows of their tenth-floor apartment. He pressed the phone to his ear one last time. It went straight to voicemail.

A cold bead of sweat trickled down Peter's spine as he reached for the heavy steel of the gun at his waist. The bad omen hadn't been broken after all.

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