

Kali's Curse

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Introduction

In the serpentine lanes of Bengal, where the air is thick with the heavy, cloying fragrance of jasmine blossoms twining around crumbling stone walls and the acrid, drifting smoke of evening prayers from countless flickering oil lamps, there exists a parallel current, a river of shadows that flows just beneath the vibrant, sun-drenched surface of everyday life. The golden hour light slants low, painting the dust-filled air in hues of amber and rose, momentarily softening the hard edges of poverty. Yet, this beauty is fragile, a thin veil over a world of whispered incantations, of faith that curdles into fear, and of remedies that smell less of healing herbs and more of the grave. Here, gods and demons are not distant concepts but intimate neighbors, their ancient stories woven into the very fabric of existence, and fate is a thing to be bartered with, wrestled from the heavens by those who know the secret, dangerous words.

The air in these hidden places always carries the same cloying perfume: the sweet, almost funereal scent of marigolds, their orange and yellow petals heaped at temple doorways, the sharp, clean bite of camphor burning on small clay altars, and the heavy, holy smoke of incense spiraling upwards, carrying silent pleas and

desperate vows. But beneath it all, a more sinister aroma lurks, something acrid and unsettlingly metallic, a scent that whispers of ambition soured into poison. It's the metallic tang of old blood, perhaps, or the bitter essence of a concoction brewed in secrecy. This is the world of the tantric, the weaver of spells, a figure cloaked in shadows, who deals in remedies for the desperate. His voice, a low, gravelly murmur, promises solace but delivers a different kind of darkness. He offers gnarled roots like the Alok lata, a parasitic vine whose vibrant yellow tendrils visually belie its deadly nature, a symbol that strangles the life from its host – a fitting, insidious emblem for the magic he wields.

The golden light fades into a deep violet twilight, and the chorus of evening sounds begins: the rhythmic chanting of mantras from a nearby temple, the distant, mournful cry of a street hawker, the playful shouts of children dwindling as night settles. Yet, the unsettling undercurrent of that metallic scent remains, a silent promise of the grim tale to unfold. This is a story born from that shadow world. It begins, as so many stories of ruin do, not with grand evil announced by thunder and lightning, but with the quiet, gnawing desperation of an empty stomach and a future as barren as a drought-stricken field under a relentless sun. It is a tale of how the relentless weight of poverty can bend a soul, twisting it until it seeks solace not in prayer, in the comforting glow of a deity's lamp, but in poison, in the hidden shadows of malevolent intent. It tracks how the desperate pursuit of a better life can lead one down a path paved with deceit, betrayal, and the inexorable, patient justice of karma. For in the land of the goddess Kali, whose dark visage watches over all, every debt is eventually paid, often in a currency far more precious than coin, and the shadows of misdeeds cast long, unyielding forms. Bengali translation has been provided at the end of the book.

Chapter 1: Roots of Desperation

The village of Agradweep was not merely built, but born from the very essence of mud and water, a place where the air hung thick with the damp, fertile scent of earth after rain, the sweet overlay of wild jasmine, and the ever-present, cloying sweetness of decay from composting organic matter and stagnant ponds. In this humble corner of West Bengal, India, Tuni first opened her eyes to a world painted in stark shades of brown—the cracked, sun-baked mud-caked walls of their hut, the murky, silt-green water of the village pond reflecting a bruised sky, and the relentless, grinding poverty that coated everything in a fine, unshakeable layer of dust. Her parents, Hambhu and Mita Barati, moved through their days with the slow, deliberate motions of people perpetually weary, their faces etched with the deep, premature lines of a battle they were slowly losing against fate. The harsh, unfiltered sunlight of the morning would expose every detail of their struggle, yet offer no warmth to their hearts.

Hambhu's life was a pilgrimage of sweat and sugar, a daily penance. Each morning, before the sun had burned the last tendrils of mist off the Hooghly River, casting the water in a muted, pearlescent grey, he would begin the long, silent walk to the train station. The rhythmic slap of his worn chappals on the dirt path was the only sound in the pre-dawn stillness, a lonely cadence against the awakening chirps of unseen birds. He labored at a sweet shop in Serampore, a place of dizzying aromas—the warm, pungent scent of cardamom, the delicate sweetness of rosewater, the sizzling hiss of ghee in vast pans, and the rich, comforting steam of simmering milk—perfumes that clung to his clothes and hair like a cruel, taunting reminder of a life of plenty that was not his. He would return late, often past midnight, a spectral figure reeking of

paradise, his pockets sometimes hiding a misshapen sandesh or a sticky rasgulla, their creamy sweetness a brief, stolen moment of joy for his waiting daughters. Mita, meanwhile, spent her days in the humid, spice-laden kitchen of the local Panchayat member, her hands perpetually stained with the bright yellow of turmeric and the fiery red of chili, the scents clinging to her skin. The meager income she earned was a small, porous dam against a relentless flood of expenses. Their family was so poor that Mita would often take Tuni and her elder sister, Dhuni, to the vegetable shops, their tattered clothes blending into the background of discarded leaves and broken baskets. They would patiently wait for discarded vegetables, their young eyes keenly scanning for any salvageable morsel amidst the refuse. They would meticulously collect the rejected produce, the faint, sweet aroma of overripe fruit mixing with the sharp, almost metallic tang of rotting greens. Back in their hut, by the flickering, smoky light of an oil lamp, the acrid smell of rot would fill the air as Mita meticulously trimmed away the blackened, mushy portions, her knife a surgeon's scalpel rescuing their next meal from the brink of total waste, a grim testament to their daily struggle for survival.

Tuni and Dhuni were wild things, their childhood a tapestry woven from threads of neglect and fierce, untamed freedom. They navigated the narrow, winding lanes of Agradweep, their senses alive to the village's vibrant, chaotic symphony. The shrill cry of the vegetable seller ("Sabzi, sabzi!"), the rhythmic clang of the blacksmith's hammer echoing from a distant forge, the distant, melodious strain of a Rabindra Sangeet tune drifting from a neighbor's radio – these were the constant, evocative sounds of their world. Education was a distant, unappealing shore. The schoolhouse, with its monotonous droning of teachers' voices and rigid discipline, felt like a cage to their restless spirits. The sisters