

## **Shadows of Lust: Murder in the Night**

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## **Introduction**

Seeking a better life, Indian IT consultant Sandy Nair achieves his dream of migrating to Australia, eventually settling into a good job in Melbourne after initial struggles and dangerous encounters in Sydney. Meanwhile, back in India, Vineeta Nair endures a tumultuous college romance with the possessive Nandan Khan, resulting in a pregnancy forcefully aborted by her devout parents. Seeing Sandy as her ticket to Australia, Vineeta hides her past and manipulates him into an arranged marriage. Despite Sandy's parents learning of her history, Sandy marries her, blinded by her perceived innocence and pressured by her dramatic declarations of love and threats of suicide.

Once in Melbourne, Vineeta quickly becomes dissatisfied with her passionless marriage to Sandy, especially after Nandan arrives on a work assignment and they reignite their affair behind Sandy's back. Sandy eventually discovers the infidelity, leading to a violent confrontation and a toxic stalemate where neither will grant the other an easy divorce. Vineeta becomes pregnant again, likely by Nandan, further poisoning the marriage. After a failed attempt to kill Sandy during a staged accident on the Great Ocean Road and a subsequent faked suicide attempt, Vineeta and a returned Nandan conspire to murder Sandy.

## **Love Triangle in Melbourne**

The pale grey light of dawn filtered through the blinds, casting long shadows across the bedroom. Ms. Vineeta Nair stirred, the lavender scent of her fabric softener clinging faintly to the sheets. She reached out, her hand brushing against the cool skin of her husband, Mr. Sandy Nair. "Sandy," she whispered, her voice soft in the morning quiet. No response. She tried again, louder, shaking his shoulder gently. Still nothing. A knot of unease tightened in her stomach. Leaning closer, she strained to hear the gentle rhythm of his breath, but there was only silence. Panic flared. She pressed her ear to his chest, searching for the steady thrum of his heart, finding only stillness beneath the soft cotton of his pyjamas. A sharp, metallic tang of fear filled her mouth.

Vineeta scrambled out of bed, her bare feet hitting the cool, polished floorboards with a soft thud. She dialled 000, the Australian helpline, her fingers trembling. "My husband..." she began, her voice cracking, "...he's not breathing! I think... I think he had a heart attack!" Her words dissolved into a high-pitched, theatrical wail that echoed in the still morning air. "Who will take care of my son now? He's dead! My husband died of a heart attack!" she sobbed into the phone, the sound raw and desperate.

When the police arrived, their sirens faded into the suburban quiet, replaced by the crunch of gravel under their boots and the sharp raps on the front door. The house smelled faintly of stale air and yesterday's cooking. Inside the bedroom, the scene was eerily calm. Mr. Sandy Nair lay peacefully on the cream-colored sheets of the family bed, looking almost serene, as if in a deep sleep. There were

no signs of struggle, no overturned lamps or rumpled rugs. The only jarring detail was the white, frothy foam clinging to the corners of his mouth, stark against his dusky skin.

Seeing the uniformed officers, their dark blue presence filling the doorway, Ms. Vineeta launched into a fresh wave of hysterics. Her cries were louder now, bouncing off the walls. "My husband! Gone! So young! What will I do? Who will take care of me?" Her voice climbed, bordering on a shriek. "I can't live without him! I want to die too!" A policewoman, her expression calm but firm, placed a hand on Vineeta's shoulder, the fabric of her uniform scratchy against Vineeta's silk robe. "Ma'am, please try to stay calm," she murmured, her voice a low counterpoint to Vineeta's keening.

"The foam?" an officer inquired gently, gesturing towards the body. Vineeta wiped tears from her reddened eyes with the back of her hand. "Whiskey," she sniffled, the faint, sweet, malty scent of it seeming to hang in the air around the bed. "He drank so much last night. I told him not to... maybe... maybe that caused it?"

When the police requested permission for an autopsy, Vineeta's grief turned to frantic refusal. "No! Don't cut him! Don't touch my husband!" she screamed, clutching her head. "Shoot me instead! Do you think I killed him? Is that it? Just shoot me! I don't want to live!" Her voice was raspy, the performance draining.

Despite her dramatic protests, the police proceeded. The soft thud of the body bag zipper closing seemed unnaturally loud in the tense room. As they carried the body out, the scent of antiseptic from their kits briefly overpowered the room's other smells. "Wait!" Vineeta cried, suddenly changing tack. "Let me come with you. Please. I need to be there. I need to know why." Reluctantly, the

police allowed her to accompany them, the siren's wail starting up again as they pulled away from the quiet house.

Later, at the Autopsy lab – a place bleached white under harsh fluorescent lights, smelling sharply of formaldehyde and disinfectant – Vineeta sought out the Director. In the stark quiet of his office, away from the clatter and hum of the lab, she made her move. The rasp of her jeans zipper was loud as she pulled them down. "Mr. Director," she said, her voice low and husky, a stark contrast to her earlier wailing. "Can you make this... report... normal? For my husband? I'll do anything."

The air thickened. The Director's gaze was cold. "Anything?" he repeated, a slow smile spreading. He named his price: a group session, starting with the lab assistant, his boss, then himself. The sterile lab, usually filled with the cold scent of steel and chemicals, became the stage for a different kind of transaction. Traces of cyanide – a substance with a faint, bitter almond scent – found in the heart, liver, and kidney were deliberately overlooked amidst the muffled sounds from behind closed doors. The final report, typed on crisp white paper, declared the cause of death: "Heart attack." Vineeta, recomposed, offered saccharine thanks, the cloying sweetness of her cheap perfume momentarily masking the lab's sterile odor.

The "Suspicious death" case was closed with the thud of a file stamp.

That night, Vineeta's home, once filled with the sounds of staged grief, now pulsed with a different energy. Deep bass notes thumped from a speaker. The sharp, fruity scent of expensive wine mingled with the acrid smoke of drugs. Ms. Vineeta Nair and her boyfriend,

Mr. Nandan, celebrated. Nandan, muscular and coiled with energy, moved towards the wall where Sandy's photo hung, his face smiling out from a polished wooden frame. With a sneer, Nandan ripped it down. The frame hit the floor, glass shattering with a loud, brittle crackle. He tore the photo into small pieces, the ripping sound sharp and violent, then flushed them down the toilet with a gurgling whoosh.

"Bastard Sandy," Nandan spat, the sound harsh in the dimly lit room, colored by the flashing LEDs of the stereo. "Thought you could kill me for sleeping with your wife? Destiny flipped the script." He laughed, a short, ugly bark. "We got away with it. Easy." He turned to Vineeta, the red wine sloshing in his glass. "But how, Vini? The autopsy? How'd you swing that?"

Vineeta took a slow sip of her wine, the dark liquid staining her lips. "I had to... entertain... a few people at the lab," she said, her voice smooth as the silk she wore.

Nandan's face contorted. "You bitch!" he yelled, the sound exploding in the room. "Slept with them? How could you be so..."

"Darling," Vineeta interrupted, her tone dangerously soft, the sweet scent of her perfume suddenly seeming cloying. "If I hadn't, we'd both be dealing with prison showers right now. Think about it. Jail." She shuddered theatrically. "It's a nasty place. No one to complain to. I saved us."

Nandan's anger deflated, replaced by a grudging admiration. He pulled her into a crushing bear hug, his sweat and cologne mixing with her perfume. "You're a genius, Vini," he murmured against her hair, the bass thumping around them. "A fucking genius. Thanks for

saving me." The ghostly scent of cyanide seemed to linger, unnoticed, beneath the wine and drugs.

## **Migrating to Australia**

Years earlier, the humid air of Bangalore, thick with the smell of exhaust fumes and spices, had been Sandy Nair's world. An IT consultant from Kochin, Kerala, his life changed during a month-long deputation to Australia. Melbourne hit him like a breath of fresh, clean air. Crystal clean streets, the emerald green of the parks, trams gliding almost silently (a soft electric hum) on free routes, friendly faces – it was a world away from the cacophony and pollution he knew. The single incident of racism – an Aboriginal man muttering "go back to your country," the words barely audible over the street noise – faded against the backdrop of perceived paradise. Melbourne felt like heaven compared to the dusty chaos of Bangalore.

Determined, Sandy studied, the tap-tap-tap of his keyboard a constant sound in his small room. He cracked the PTE test, scoring over 79 in all sections. His PR score hit 65. Four months later, the email arrived – PR granted. The digital chime signalling its arrival was the sweetest sound he'd heard.