

The Day It Rained Money

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Introduction

In the labyrinthine heart of Old Delhi, where history clings to every crumbling facade and the air is a rich tapestry of spice, sweat, and exhaust, life is a constant negotiation. It is a city of a million tiny transactions, not all of them recorded on paper. Here, the gears of daily life are often greased by a currency of convenience, a quiet understanding that flows from pocket to pocket, unseen and unspoken. It is the cost of doing business, of keeping the peace, of simply getting by.

This system of petty corruption is as much a part of the landscape as the ancient mosques and the tangled overhead wires. It is a low-grade fever in the city's bloodstream, a sickness so chronic that most have forgotten what it feels like to be healthy. They pay the price, they swallow the indignity, and they move on.

But every so often, one of these small, sordid transactions is dragged from the shadows into the harsh light of day. Every so often, an ordinary man, pushed too far, refuses to negotiate. This is the story of one such moment—a moment when a simple spice merchant's refusal to pay a bribe set off a chain reaction that would rain money onto a crowded street, shatter a corrupt policeman's world, and prove that even in the dust of Old Delhi, the seeds of integrity can still find a place to grow.

Chapter 1: The Weight of a Lie

The morning sun, a brilliant, molten gold, slanted through the open door of Salim's spice shop, cutting a dusty, dancing beam through the cool, fragrant air. It illuminated a world of colour so intense it seemed to hum with life. Mounds of spices rose like miniature landscapes on the worn wooden counter: the fiery, volcanic red of chilli powder, the rich, sunshine-yellow of turmeric, the earthy, deep brown of cumin, and the precious, emerald green of whole cardamom pods. The air itself was a thick, intoxicating tapestry of scent, a complex perfume woven from a hundred different threads—the sweet warmth of cinnamon, the sharp punch of cloves, the nutty aroma of toasted coriander, and the ever-present, foundational scent of turmeric and cardamom. Salim's hands, usually as steady and precise as the brass weights on his scales, trembled slightly as they hovered over a scoop of peppercorns. The familiar, comforting world he had built, scent by scent, transaction by transaction, had suddenly become a suffocating, hostile space.

Across the counter, the man who had poisoned it all watched him. Assistant Sub-Inspector Mukesh Kumar's khaki uniform was a dull, sweat-stained blot against the shop's vibrancy, seeming to absorb the light and colour around it. The air near him was soured with the scent of stale sweat and a cheap, cloying hair oil, a smell of petty authority that curdled the rich aroma of the spices. But it was his eyes that held the true menace. They were small, dark, and hard, and the bright morning light reflecting in them wasn't a sparkle but a cold, predatory glint, harder and more pitiless than the polished steel of Salim's scales. The bazaar outside carried on with its daily symphony—the distant, rhythmic clang of a hammer on metal, the

cheerful, high-pitched cries of a vegetable seller, the insistent ringing of a cycle-rickshaw's bell—but here inside, an unnatural silence had fallen, broken only by Kumar's voice.

"A misunderstanding, you see," Kumar had said, his voice a low, conspiratorial murmur that felt obscene in the honest light of day. The words slid through the air like something greasy. "A complaint has been filed. Very serious allegations." He leaned closer, and Salim could hear the soft wheeze in his chest. "Association with certain... undesirable elements". The phrase hung in the air, a phantom accusation, a wisp of smoke given monstrous shape. Salim's heart, a frantic bird trapped in his chest, hammered against his ribs. He was a simple man whose world was contained within the blue-washed walls of his shop and his small home; his most significant associations were with his neighbours, to whom he offered little more than polite greetings.

"I am an honest man, Inspector Sahab," Salim managed, his voice a dry whisper that was swallowed by the fragrant air. "I have done nothing wrong." Kumar's lips peeled back into a slow, greasy smile that did not touch his cold eyes. "Honesty is an expensive commodity, Salim Miyan. And in your case, keeping this... misunderstanding... quiet has a price". He named the figure then, and the number seemed to suck all the air from the small shop. Fifteen thousand rupees. Salim felt a wave of dizziness, the vibrant colours of the spices blurring at the edges of his vision. He thought of his daughter's school fees, the neat stack of bills tucked away in a tin box. He thought of the loan for the shop, a constant, heavy weight in his mind. He thought of Afsana's wedding jewellery, glinting softly in its velvet box, his last resort for a true emergency. This felt like an emergency, a catastrophe of a kind he had never imagined.

"I... I don't have that kind of money," he stammered, the words tasting like ash in his mouth. The feigned friendliness vanished from Kumar's voice, replaced by a sharp, menacing edge that was as cold as his eyes. "Find it". He tapped a thick, nicotine-stained finger on the counter, the sound a sharp crack in the silence, inches from the brilliant mound of red chilli powder. The gesture was a violation, a dirtying of Salim's clean space. "Consider it an investment in your peace of mind. Hauz Qazi police station. Tomorrow. 12:30 in the afternoon. Don't be late". With a final, contemptuous look, the policeman turned. His boots scuffed loudly on the clean floor as he swaggered out, a dark stain disappearing back into the bright, chaotic colours of the bazaar. Salim was left alone, standing amidst the suddenly dull and muted hues of his livelihood. The weight of the false accusation, of the lie, was heavier than any sack of grain he had ever lifted. It threatened to crush the very breath from his body, leaving only the sickening, sour scent of fear.

Chapter 2: A Sleepless Night

Sleep was a distant country Salim could not reach. He lay on the thin mattress on the floor, the world reduced to a sensorium of stifling darkness. The hot, sticky air of the September night was a physical weight, a damp blanket that clung to his skin. Above, the old ceiling fan whirred and clicked, a monotonous, metallic heartbeat that did nothing to stir the stagnant air. It only seemed to amplify the sounds of the small room: the soft, rhythmic breathing of his wife, Afsana, and the deeper, slower breaths of their two children, a peaceful chorus utterly at odds with the frantic, screaming chaos in his mind. Every time he dared to close his eyes, the darkness behind his lids was seared with an image: ASI Kumar's