

Chapter Two

Arlington

The autumn semester had just started when Kalpana and Romi boarded the plane in New Delhi for the journey to the United States. After entering the country on 1 September 1982, their first stop was Chicago, where they stayed overnight with a family friend. The next day brought them to Arlington, Texas, where Kalpana registered for her classes and found a place to live — as it turned out, two doors from me. Romi's job in accompanying Kalpana to Arlington was to ensure that she was settled both in lodging and in school and that she stayed out of trouble. He did a great job with the first two tasks; his performance with regard to the latter is debatable.

When asked about how Kalpana and I met, the answer I give depends on who is asking. My three standard responses include:

- Arranged marriage.
- The British were in India for over 200 years and it has been a tradition for our two families to intermarry each generation.
- Kalpana moved into an apartment two doors down from me.

The reaction to the answer given depends on the gullibility of the questioner.

I first saw Kalpana when I walked past her apartment the day she arrived in Arlington. Covered with a blanket, she was sleeping on the floor of a very sparsely furnished apartment, facing away from the window into which I glanced as I passed by. I thought, “This poor Indian girl cannot afford a bed”, so I later offered a collapsible bed to her roommate who answered the door. She invited me in, and a moment after I sat down, Kalpana awoke and turned to face me. Before a word was said, I was immediately struck by the inner fire that glowed through her beautiful dark eyes. After I mentioned the purpose of my visit, she laughed and politely declined my offer, saying that she had a bed but had fallen asleep on the floor, no doubt as a result of the arduous journey started two days earlier in Chandigarh. After a further brief exchange I left for my apartment.