

## Wheels Within Wheels

Once the border crossing from Canada to the United States was accomplished, Tanya felt as if the proverbial umbilical cord had been finally cut. It was a sharp, surgical break, a point of no return.

Tanya and the other passengers had been asked to get off the bus for the customs and immigration check. As she stood in line, Tanya couldn't help getting emotional. Canada, the country of her childhood, was behind her. The US was to be her new home.

Looking at the US immigration counters, she already sensed a cultural divide. The uniformed officials seemed so curt and hostile, barking questions at the passengers who were being interrogated before her. She'd have to get used to the whole 'gun' culture, and would certainly miss the kinder, gentler Canadian way.

For the first time in her life, Tanya was completely, utterly, unnervingly on her own. She was leaving Toronto behind, letting go of her pampered existence in her childhood home, to start a new life in New York. After the sheltered life she had led, breaking away and becoming an independent career girl was not going to be easy.

However, at twenty-three, she felt she was ready to make the transition. Sooner or later, she had to learn to fend for herself, so when the opportunity presented itself, Tanya felt the timing was right. And the beautiful spring day seemed such a perfect start to her new life. By early evening, the bus would be in New York.

Looking back, Tanya went over the sequence of events that had brought her to the border crossing. She recalled her first reaction when the US job offer came through. She had been over the moon. That such a prestigious New York-based financial services firm would actually want to hire her was an achievement in itself. The scope of the job was enormous and the growth prospects exciting. Without a doubt, it was going to be an extremely challenging new phase in her banking career.

She had consulted her parents on the choice she was making, and they had been fully supportive of her move. Her parents knew that their

daughter, with her academically brilliant record and impressive qualifications, was bound to succeed. They were very proud of her, their only child.

But even now, after she'd cleared immigration, and the bus was speeding towards the next halt, Syracuse, Tanya was unable wrap her head around it.

Over the last week, she had enjoyed the many farewell get-togethers that had been hosted in her honor. Colleagues and friends had pulled out the stops to give her a memorable send-off. She was really going to miss them all. They had been her support system through years of high school, and later, through university. Most of her friends were still in Toronto, living, working, and loving in the city where her world had once revolved.

While saying goodbye to her friends had been hard, the final farewell to her parents had been so much harder. Hugging her mom tight, Tanya had found it hard to hold back her tears. She was really going to miss them both, very much. Her father, Nirvik Sen, was a professor at the University of Toronto, while her mother, Piyali, taught at Ryerson; two highly academic people, both gentle souls, always encouraging her to do her best and excel in whatever she decided to do.

What would her business card say? wondered Tanya, as she gazed out at the speeding landscape. Tanya Sen, Investment Banking Analyst. Well, it didn't sound all that grand. She was starting at the bottom of the food chain, but then, you had to start somewhere.

Tanya had already been told that working in the US would be far more demanding than her banking job in Canada. She had to keep reminding herself she could do it, that she was up for the challenge. That's why they'd hired her, hadn't they? She was quite determined to make her mark as a hot-shot banking professional, regardless of geography.

She had preferred to take the bus so she could take three suitcases and not have to worry about excess baggage. There was still more stuff she had needed to pack in—her beloved soft toys, her guitar, and her book collection—but that would have to wait for future trips. As it was, there was barely enough space for all her clothes, bags and shoes. This didn't include the last minute odds and ends that she had hurriedly crammed

into her hand luggage. All that extra stuff was almost bursting out of the big satchel by her side.

Although the bus had free internet access, Tanya was happier just looking out of the picture window, watching the world go by. She had chosen to be on the upper deck for the view. With her iPod for company, she was able to catch up on the latest Bollywood hits, something she rarely got to do when she was at work. A road trip was always so therapeutic, she reflected, and took a moment to glance at her fellow passengers. Tanya was vastly amused to see that the bus ride was so soporific; almost everyone around her was fast asleep.

Tanya enjoyed an uninterrupted hour of music, then, lulled by the steady drone of the engine, she ended up dozing off too. She was jerked awake when the bus began to slow down. Peering out of the window, she saw that they were veering off the main highway and getting onto a parallel side lane towards a rest stop. She was glad. It would give her a chance to freshen up and get something to eat. She was looking forward to stretching her legs too, and was hoping for a longish halt.

From her perch on the upper deck, Tanya continued to watch idly, as other vehicles turned into the parking area. She noticed a particularly striking red BMW convertible taking a sharp turn in. It went by so fast, she didn't even have a chance to see the driver. Strange, she mused, why did people in red cars always drive faster? Or was it because that they drove fast that they preferred red cars?

The bus driver pulled up in front of the rest area and announced a ten-minute halt. Tanya rummaged under her seat for her sneakers. A nice hot cappuccino was just what she needed right now, she figured, as she laced up her sneakers and slung her satchel over her shoulder. Soon, she was filing out of the bus along with the rest of the crowd.

\* \* \*

Her first stop was the ladies washroom. It felt good to splash some cold water on her face and run a brush through her long black tresses. Tanya looked at herself in the mirror. People had told her she was drop-dead gorgeous, but Tanya never took the compliments seriously. What she saw was an almost too perfect oval face with winged eyebrows, below which were luminous grey eyes gazing thoughtfully back at her. Her lips could

have been a little less full—she was a bit conscious of their being overtly sensuous—but obviously men didn't seem think so. She had often been compared to Scarlett Johansson in the smile department, so she wasn't complaining.

Tanya leaned forward and refreshed her lip cooler, a signature pale coral. Tucking the lip liner back into her bag and chucking the used paper towels into the nearest bin, she was good to go.

Once she was outside, she spied the Subway counter. Perfect, she thought, she'd get herself a tuna sub and a coffee. But she knew she'd have to hurry, because the line was getting longer. The last thing she wanted was for the bus to leave without her. Tanya quickened her step to beat other hungry passengers with the same idea. But she was still quite a distance from taking her place in the queue when she was tripped up, quite literally, by her own carelessness.

She had taken off her sneakers in the bus, and, while lacing them up before getting off, she hadn't knotted the laces as tightly as she should have. As a result, the laces had simply come undone. Now, as she stepped on the undone shoelace, she lost her balance and flew forward, face down. She braced herself for the impact of her five foot six inch frame hitting the floor. But the crash never came.

In that split second, Tanya found herself being scooped up by a pair of arms—arms that felt strong and sure—reaching out with athletic precision and grabbing her before she could make contact with the floor. She could feel the pressure of those arms around her waist, steadying and supporting her to a semi-upright position.

Her legs still shaky and her breath coming in short bursts, Tanya looked up at her savior. If the first shock had left her breathless, the second time around it was shock and awe of a different kind. Tanya just stopped breathing altogether.

She was in the arms of this incredibly, amazingly good-looking guy. She was staring into eyes so intense that Tanya wondered, for a fleeting second, if she had actually fallen and the fall was making her a little delusional. It was a dreamlike state of suspended reality, like a slow motion movie sequence, in which fantasies like this one happen.

But fantasies, by definition, had to have a shelf life. As soon as she could stand on her own, he let go of her. Tanya was released into the real

world once more; back on terra firma, back with her feet firmly planted on the ground.

As her eyes moved over his well-defined chest, clad in light, see-through linen, she suddenly became conscious of her own neckline. As she had flipped forward, her top had dipped way too low, revealing more cleavage than she intended to show.

He seemed to be mocking her with his eyes, as if aware of the effect he was having on her and enjoying it. “You okay?”

His obvious amusement, at her expense, made her feel three years old. Anyone could see she was not okay. She turned to him coldly.

“I’m fine, thanks, I’m so sorry, I...” she couldn’t continue. What could she say? Sorry I happened to fling myself at you? Sorry my clothes and thoughts are in complete disarray, but hey, thanks for your timely intervention?

He smiled. “No problem, happy to help. I’m Arjun, by the way. Hi.”

She looked up at him. “I’m Tanya, Tanya Sen.” Arjun. Oh my God. She had hoped he would be Spanish, Mexican, Italian, Arab, any nationality but Indian. While she couldn’t quite understand why, his being Indian made her situation even more humiliating. She figured that no one else had come to her rescue, because they had all assumed, quite naturally, that she and Arjun were together.

But her embarrassment did not end there. Her satchel had been tossed a slight distance away, with its contents scattered all over the floor. Tanya recalled her mother’s constant refrain. *Zip up your bags properly, important things could fall out.* Why, oh why, had she not heeded the sage advice? For her, it was turning out to be ‘how to make a ridiculous first impression when you meet a guy’ nightmare, unfolding in broad daylight.

“Your bag,” he said, “I’ll give you a hand.”

She could have died a thousand deaths. All her cosmetics, stuffed into her satchel pockets, were rolling about in various directions. The collection of lip liners, eye pencils, mascara, make-up brushes, and skin creams made her look like top contender for the Miss Vanity title at a beauty contest.

She was on her knees, quickly picking up whatever she could lay her hands on and stuffing it back into her satchel. Arjun was kneeling beside her, plucking things off the floor, her passport folder, pens, chewing gum, and a lip pencil or two. That’s when she noticed the loose tampons.

Praying that he hadn't spotted them yet, she swooped down and surreptitiously slid them into her bag. Finally, and fortunately, they were almost through. She retrieved her cell phone, and he waylaid the last rolling lipstick.

They both rose at the same time, and once again, she was overcome with a sense of deep embarrassment. He was eying her speculatively.

"Can I get you a sandwich, coffee, or something?" he asked.

"Oh. No, no thanks, I...I'm not hungry." She was mortified enough without having this man buy her food. She would rather go hungry. "I didn't see you, umm, on the bus?"

"I'm driving. I usually fly when it's a business trip, but driving's great too. Gives me a chance to open up the car a bit." Arjun, who was facing the exit, suddenly touched her arm. "Hey, isn't that your bus." he exclaimed. "You better hurry, before..."

Tanya's hand flew to her face. "Oh my God, yes, my bus, I'm gonna miss my bus." Had the encounter left her so bereft of her senses that she had ceased to function? With another hurried thank you, and goodbye, she ran towards her bus. The bus driver had the motor running, but he was still finishing his coffee.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, as Arjun made his way towards the Starbucks counter, he noticed a clip lying on the floor. It was a very pretty diamante clip, and because it had flown some distance away, they had both missed it. He grabbed it and ran towards the bus. He might still be able to restore the beautiful hair accessory to its beautiful owner.

He was just in time. Tanya was climbing into the bus when he caught up with her. In a highly dramatic moment, straight out of a Bollywood flick, as he handed her the clip, she boarded the bus with a grateful smile, and the door shut behind her. The bus rolled away and soon, disappeared from sight.

He smiled to himself as he re-lived the encounter. She was chaotic and scatty, this Tanya, but kind of cute. Then he remembered he still had to get Lily her latte and he wanted a jasmine tea. He was headed back to the Starbucks when he saw Lily coming towards him. She'd got out of the car and was looking distinctly irritated.

“What was *that* all about? Who *was* that girl?”

“Oh, that was Tanya, let’s just say she’s the girl who drops things.”

\* \* \*

On the bus a short while later, Tanya’s attention was caught by the same red convertible she had seen earlier. The car was overtaking them, a little slower this time, so she was able to take a look the driver. Yes, it was Arjun, the very same Arjun, picking up speed and zooming away, with a beautiful redhead by his side. They were talking about something and the redhead was laughing. Maybe he was telling her about the whole episode and she was finding it funny, Tanya reflected savagely.

She tilted her head back and shut her eyes. But she couldn’t get the picture of the laughing redhead and Arjun out of her mind. A guy like Arjun had to have a girlfriend, she told herself. In fact, she was quite sure girls must be constantly throwing themselves at him. Tanya told herself she had no intention of being one of them. True, she had practically fallen at his feet, quite literally at that, but it had been a pure accident.

It was one of those freak twists of fate that their paths had crossed. Then, he had gone his way, and she hers. After all, what were the chances of bumping into him again? Probably one in several million. She tried to distract herself with her music, but her thoughts kept going back to the way he had held her. Tanya knew she would never be able forget that. She was not sure she wanted to.

≈

## New York, New York

The bus was an hour late. But apart from that minor inconvenience, Tanya reached New York without further incident. Zara, the sister of her best friend in Toronto, Zoya Siddiqui, was meeting her. Zara lived in Jersey City with her Italian husband, Tom Mancini. They had insisted that Tanya stay with them till she found her own accommodation. Their three-bedroom condo in Jersey City, overlooking the Hudson waterfront, had two spare bedrooms, one of which was going to be a nursery in about six months. Zara and Tom were expecting their first baby.

Since the bus only stopped in midtown Manhattan, and Tanya had so much luggage, Zara had offered to pick her up. They had a loud and boisterous reunion as both hugged each other with exclamations of delight.

“Oh my God, look at you.” Tanya bent down to pat Zara’s tiny baby bump. “Hey, hello in there, I’m introducing myself. This is your aunt, Tanya, nappy-changer-in-waiting,” she announced, laughing. Then she looked up at Zara and tapped her own head. “Touch wood, Zee, you’re glowing, and gorgeous as ever. And oh, by the way, I’m carrying that *dudhi halwa* you were craving, plus *khatta meetha aam ka aachar*, *pudina chutney*, and...”

“Stop, stop, stop, or I’m going make you open your bags right here.” laughed Zara.

Tom had wanted to be there too, but he was travelling. Tanya knew him only slightly, having met him during their wedding about two years ago. But Zara was, for Tanya, the elder sister she never had. Whenever she and Zoya got into trouble, Zara was the one who would be looking out for them.

They waited for the luggage to be unloaded and as soon as Tanya identified her bags, they were wheeling the luggage towards Zara’s waiting SUV. Zara had actually managed the impossible; she had squeezed her vehicle into a parking spot quite close by.

Tanya had been to New York on vacation several times before, but this time round, she was seeing the city with new eyes. Zara pulled out



into the midtown section and Tanya had a chance to look around. She tried to identify some of the famous city landmarks, but somehow, everything looked different. And the real difference was, Tanya told herself, that she was no longer a tourist in the city. She was a local New Yorker.

\* \* \*

As Zara negotiated her way towards the Holland Tunnel, Tanya's Blackberry rang. She glanced at the caller ID. 'Ma'. It was her mother calling. Tanya did not have long distance on her cell phone yet, and had planned to call her parents once she reached Zara's. But, obviously, her mom had beaten her to it.

"Hello, Ma?"

There was a pause at the other end. "Hello? Hello? Who is this?"

Tanya was taken aback. The ID said 'Ma' but this wasn't her mother. Who on earth was this, talking from her mother's cell phone?

"Is Arjun there, please? This is his mother here."

Tanya froze. The cell phone wasn't hers. This was Arjun's cell phone, and this was Arjun's mother calling. In the process of retrieving her stuff from the floor, she had picked up his Blackberry and put in her bag. She suspected her own Blackberry, identical-looking, was also in her bag, tucked away at the bottom, because her cell phone had not fallen out at all.

Oh my God, she thought, was there anything further she could do to make herself look like a bungling, incompetent, klutzy disaster on two legs? Tanya seriously doubted it.

"Erm, Arjun is not here, Aunty, I just happen to have his cell, by, umm, mistake. I will give it to him, umm, as soon as possible. I'm so sorry about this, any message you'd like to pass on?"

"No, he was going to stay the night in New York City, with his..." she stopped, and Tanya guessed, correctly, that she meant his redhead. "I'm sure he'll call me—you don't worry. And you are...?"

"Tanya, Aunty. Again, I'm really sorry about the mix-up."

"Oh, it's okay, Tanya. I wanted to ask, are you Indian?" the old lady wanted to know.

"Yes Aunty, I'm Tanya Sen."

“Tanya, *beta*, you called me Ma, remember. You thought I was your mother? You know, I don’t like aunty-wanty; can you please keep calling me Ma? Make an old lady happy?”

“Oh...er...yes of course, Ma.” Tanya wasn’t sure what to say next, so, with a promise to stay in touch, she signed off.

Tanya turned to Zara, her head in a whirl. “Whoa, I think I just acquired another mother.”

Zara was focused on changing lanes and wasn’t paying full attention. “Honey, you keep adding to your family tree on a daily basis. I’ll never forget the taxi driver who became your uncle. Didn’t he invite you home for dinner?”

They both smiled. But inside, Tanya was feeling awful. She now had the unenviable task of letting Arjun know that his cell phone, which he hadn’t yet discovered missing, was sitting in her bag. She wanted to get it over with, but not in the car. She preferred the privacy of her room in Zara’s condo to make that call.

But barely a couple of minutes later, her cell phone, or rather, *Arjun’s* cell phone rang. Tanya knew who it was, even before he spoke.

“Hello, Tanya.” It was Arjun all right, sounding curt. She could pick up the irritation in his voice even over the phone.

“Er...yes, I have your phone with me, I picked it up by mistake, I’m so sorry, I...”

“Don’t apologize,” he cut in, “let’s just figure how I can get it back. I need that cell ASAP Tanya, like, first thing tomorrow. Where do you stay?”

When Tanya mentioned she was with friends in Jersey City, Arjun paused. “Jersey City, okay, that’s not too bad then, I’m stopping by for breakfast in Jersey City. How’s breakfast, seven thirty?”

Seven thirty in the morning. But after pocketing his cell phone and running away, Tanya knew she was in no position to kick up a fuss. She quickly agreed. He mentioned a breakfast diner that he said happened to be walking distance from where she was staying, and added, in a slightly kinder tone, that he was looking forward to seeing her.

So that was that. Tanya stared at the cell in her hands. Looking forward to getting his phone back, sure, but seeing her again? No way. He had sounded pretty cheesed off. Given her record, she couldn’t really blame him. He had witnessed her tripping over herself, almost missing a

bus, and now, he had tracked his missing cell phone to her. He must have written her off as one of those bubble-headed bimbettes who can't seem to get anything right.

Although she wasn't expecting to redeem herself in his eyes, Tanya didn't want to come out looking like a complete loser. She still cared about what he thought of her. This time, she decided, she needed to set the record straight. He needed to see her for what she was—a smart, savvy, self-assured girl, who had just happened to have a bad day.

\* \* \*

The next morning Tanya was up at dawn. She had already explained to Zara that she needed to be out early, to return a fellow passenger's cell phone. To make sure she didn't keep Arjun waiting, Tanya was actually at the diner five minutes ahead of time. He was five minutes late. She had half expected his redhead to be with him, but Arjun walked in alone.

As soon as she spied him, Tanya's heart skipped a beat. He was even more impossibly good-looking than she remembered. No man had any right to look that sexy in a business suit, this early in the morning. He came forward, looking apologetic.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. I'm late."

Tanya assured him that she had only just come herself. He settled down opposite her, and smiled. "We meet under more, er more congenial circumstances."

Tanya said, "I hope so, I mean, it's all my fault, I'm so..."

He held up his hand. "Hey mistakes happen, you know. I made a mistake too, I was really rude when you called. So now we're quits." He glanced at his Blackberry on the table. "And, of course, there's the happy ending. I get my phone back."

She handed it over. "Fully charged. It was the least I could do."

Arjun accepted his Blackberry back with great ceremony and pressed a couple of numbers on the keypad. "Just making sure it's mine, and you're not giving me yours by mistake."

When he saw Tanya blushing in embarrassment, he laughed out loud and lightly touched her arm. "Hey, just kidding." Then suddenly, he became more businesslike. "Okay, let's order breakfast right away. Today's one of those crazy days, so..."

He handed her the menu. “Whenever I stay in New York City, I end up here for breakfast, it’s on my way to work.”

“So you stay in New York?” she asked.

Arjun seemed reluctant to discuss his residential whereabouts. “Umm, depends. I’m usually with my mother, we have a home in Bergen County.” He paused, and then continued reluctantly. “I stay over with Lily sometimes. I’m not sure you saw her, she was in the car with me when we met at the bus terminal.”

Tanya didn’t want to admit she’d seen Lily in the car. And in all fairness, she’d only seen her later, when they had driven off.

“I was in such a rush, I wasn’t observing much,” she murmured.

He merely smiled and lapsed into silence.

However, she felt she needed to keep the conversation going. “Oh, and did your Mom mention she had called for you on your cell, and we spoke for a bit? I really liked her.”

Arjun had been aware of the conversation. But again, for some reason, he stonewalled any further discussion on the topic. Tanya could take a hint, and decided to drop the subject. She turned her attention to the menu.

Frowning at the various selections on offer, undecided between the pancakes and waffles, Tanya had absolutely no idea that she was being scrutinized. But Arjun found he could not take his eyes off her long lashes and full mouth, the graceful curve of her neck, and the way the morning sun outlined her body, making her look like a model in a couture label ad. He was more attracted to her than he had been to any woman in a long time.

Just a moment back, when she had blushed at something he had said, he was struck by how desirable she was. He relived their first encounter in his head, remembering her body pressed against his. What made her really special was, unlike most of the women he had known, she appeared to be completely unaware of the effect she had on the opposite sex.

“Umm, pancakes and maple syrup, with a side of mint potatoes.” She looked up. “Would you recommend that?”

Arjun confirmed that it was a good choice, and ordered for both of them. Soon, they were talking about each other’s lives, about her new job in New York City and his family business in chemicals and plastics.

“Family business, so you’re your own boss. Sounds great.” Tanya was happy there was something he was prepared to open up about.

“Yeah, well, I run it. My Dad’s no more.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“It was a while back.” He stirred his coffee thoughtfully. “In fact, I’m expanding in a big way now, setting up a whole new facility, it’s...” He shook his head, smiling slightly. “Hey don’t let’s go on about my stuff, it’s kind of technical, so...”

“So you think I might not understand?” Tanya said with a smile.

He laughed. “No, I think we have more interesting things to talk about.”

Tanya really wanted to talk about Lily, but she had the impression that Lily was not up for discussion. The last thing she wanted to do, she thought to herself, was to jump into yet another disaster zone.

“Tell me, what’s a good way to spend time outside of work? The city has so much, I don’t know where to start.”

“You pick what you enjoy,” Arjun responded. “I mean, me, I’m a jazz and wine kind of guy, and I have a boat, so I...”

“A boat. Wow.”

“Yeah, it’s nice to get away sometimes.”

Tanya was dying to know what it was he liked getting away from, but she could hardly ask.

“What I’m saying is you’ll be spoiled for choice. I’m guessing you won’t have much time, so you’ll have to decide what you...” He was interrupted by someone slapping his back.

“Arjun Mehta, *tu yahaan.*”

Arjun swiveled his head. Tanya looked up too, to see a nice looking young guy, very smartly dressed in a dark suit, with a briefcase in his hand.

Arjun got up, his hands outstretched. “Hey, Karsh, man, good to see you. It’s been a while.”

Tanya watched as they did a sort of half hug, half handshake. Arjun turned to her and said, “Tanya, meet an old friend, Karsh, Karsh Oberoi. He’s a banker, with Bank of...”

“Oh no not anymore, I just joined Wells Fargo. My new office is around the corner.”

Arjun shook his head in mock disapproval. “You bankers, always so flighty and faithless. Well, meet another member of your profession, Tanya, from Toronto. Investment banker, and as of yesterday, a New Yorker.”

Tanya smiled up at Karsh. “Yeah, one more flighty banker on the move. I join BlackRock on Monday, Manhattan office.”

Karsh was amused. “Small world. My ex-boss heads one of the fund groups there.”

When Arjun asked Karsh to join them for breakfast, he hesitated a bit. “Umm, I was planning a bagel to go, but...” he glanced at Tanya, “hey, what the hell.” He smiled, pulled up a chair, and raised his hand for the waitress.

Being an extrovert, Karsh Oberoi was friendly and helpful by nature. He gave Tanya some useful info for her first day on the job. She listened eagerly, only too pleased to be getting valuable tips from an insider.

Arjun, observing them both in animated conversation, could see that they had hit it off from the word go. For some reason, he mused, there had been no easy banter in his interaction with her, even in their second meeting. Tanya’s manner towards him was friendly, but much more formal, more guarded. He wasn’t quite sure why.

However, there was one thing he was quite sure about. He wasn’t planning on seeing her again. She was a little too distracting for his peace of mind.

After Karsh had given Tanya his business card and said goodbye, Arjun had her all to himself once more. Tanya got the feeling he was in a big hurry to get away. “So. It was great meeting you again,” he glanced at his Blackberry to check a text message, “I should be running. It’s going to be a crazy morning for me. Can I drop you someplace, or...?”

“No, no thanks, I’ll just walk back.” She had been hoping, for her own illogical reasons, that he might want to see her again. She smiled up at him. “I have *your* phone number, maybe I should give you mine.” She watched as Arjun pulled out his Blackberry once more, and punched in her details. But she could see he was doing it mechanically. It was a formality and he had to go through the motions.

When he spoke, she knew he wouldn’t be calling anytime soon. The farewell sounded quite final. “Good luck on the new job, Tanya. All the best.”

Tanya nodded her thanks, and Arjun turned to go. He raised his hand in farewell, and made his way towards the parked car.

She had managed to retain her composure throughout the conversation, which, fortunately, was mercifully short. But as she turned away from Arjun, Tanya felt a strange disappointment, a sense of loss. She could *not* understand why she was reacting in this weird way. She hardly knew Arjun; she'd met him just once—okay twice, if you counted the best-forgotten incident at the rest stop. So why was she behaving like a simpering Regency heroine, going all weak-kneed and teary-eyed for a guy she barely knew?

Tanya donned her wraparound glares and squared her shoulders. She lengthened her stride towards Zara's condo. She was closing the chapter on Arjun Mehta; she was deleting him from her memory files, for good. Control, alt, delete.

After all, she had many more important things to occupy her life.

