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Sleeping Demon

The last weekend had not gone well for Manoh, to say the least. Now he sat distracted on his bed. He rarely stayed in his bedroom. The only times when he came up to his bedroom were for sex, shower or sleep. Here he was, wide awake, alone and with no plans for a shower. What he had thought was behind him had suddenly re-emerged. What he had thought he had managed to push deep into the recesses of his mind suddenly surfaced and the weekend he had meticulously planned, had collapsed and left him feeling anxious. He had put on a strong face and managed to see the weekend through. He was quite sure even Nathan had not seen the disquiet in him.

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When Nathan heard about Manoh and Santhu he was not surprised. Santhu had all the five requirements Manoh demanded in his men; fair, young, tall, innocent and Indian. Some of Manoh's earlier conquests were not quite men yet and Nathan had often told Manoh that his preference for young boys dangerously bordered on paedophilia and breached the age-of-consent law. To this comment, Manoh would retort, 'There's no age of consent for gay sex in this country.' Nathan would then use his legal background to remind Manoh that the legal age for marriage for men was eighteen. This, of course, was nonsense when it came to gay men, as all homosexual acts were criminalized in Malaysia. Anyway, Santhu, Manoh's business partner's son, who was doing his A-levels, barely looked eighteen.

Nathan himself had been one of Manoh's early conquests. Nathan had just



turned twenty when he met Manoh. Within a few months they had become a couple. However, their relationship was doomed from the beginning. Manoh was always on the prowl and did not know the meaning of the word ‘monogamous’. And sadly, unlike Dorian Gray, mere mortal Nathan began to age. Nathan was still fair-skinned but no longer young. Now at thirty-five, Nathan could still pass off for a late twenty-something man. But Manoh had gone beyond him. The many years of vegetarianism, teetotaling and evening runs kept his body slim and firm. After more than a decade of their failed relationship, Manoh’s and Nathan’s love for Kathak music still bound them. Even as they slowly drifted away from each other and were no longer in a sexual relationship, they continued to have sex with other men. Nathan became Manoh’s confidant and listened to his every new encounter.

Manoh was also one of those gay men who could not resist being attracted to straight men. His personal motto was there are no straight men. They had not just met the right gay man. And Manoh saw himself as the right gay man to the men he was often attracted to. Nathan, however, had to admit that Manoh had a high success rate. Beer and straight porn often made the guys he desired so horny, they could be coaxed to receive a hand job or even receive a blow job. So Manoh got his way with many straight men. And once he had his way with them, they held no interest for him anymore.

“But they do nothing for you!” Nathan had once told him.

And Manoh immediately replied, “Of course they do, you just don’t know how much pleasure I get.”

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Nathan was seated at a banana-leaf restaurant having his afternoon tea when Manoh arrived. Manoh was immaculately dressed in his trademark



complete black attire, this time in a T-shirt and denim jeans. Nathan managed to get him out of his tailored slacks when he told him he might be mistaken for an Indian fresh out of an Air Asia flight from India. Manoh's black outfits further accentuated his dark complexion, the exact effect he wanted to project. Unlike many Indian men, Manoh was clean-shaven; no moustache or a designer beard, just two prominent side-burns that ran down to his earlobe. The only hair on his face were his rather bushy eyebrows. His hair was cut short and pitch black; dyed every fortnight, a part of his Sunday routine.

After ordering their masala tea and vadais, Manoh started talking about Santhu, in his typical fashion.

"Took Santhu for a movie yesterday night. He's so cute."

"His parents don't mind? A weekday night, even!"

"No, la. They thanked me for taking him off their hands and to a Hindi movie they don't want to watch."

"Very convenient for you, Manoh."

Manoh had his mischievous smile on and now it looked like a smirk. Nathan was not very comfortable with what was going on. But he felt he couldn't judge Manoh. "How are the arrangements for Banu's son's wedding coming along for this weekend?" Nathan asked Manoh, changing the subject.

"Krish has sorted out the arrangements for travel and accommodation. We can go with him, Saras, and Santhu. They have a seven-seater."

Nathan sensed where this was going. "I'll stay with my mum in Kuantan. So no worries about my accommodation," Nathan told Manoh.

"No worries la, they have a huge bungalow with enough rooms for all of us. Krish is Banu's cousin and she wants us all to stay together in their house. Let's all stay together. Less hassle to go for the dawn wedding ceremony on



Saturday.”

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Nathan took a Grab to Manoh’s apartment. Krish arrived a few minutes later and they set off once both Nathan and Manoh had put their luggage in the booth. Nathan made himself comfortable at the back row while Manoh promptly placed himself next to Santhu, in front of him. The three-hour car drive was uneventful. Besides the driver, everyone was busy with their mobile phones. Somewhere along the journey, Santhu had lain on Manoh’s ever-ready shoulder and fallen asleep, an earphone still in his ear and the other half in Manoh’s. Manoh must have been as happy as a dog with a new bone. The traffic was kind until they arrived right smack into after-office-hour Friday traffic. They arrived at Banu’s bungalow at Teluk Cempadak while evening tea was still being served.

There certainly were many people at the house. Most of them seemed like relatives and Manoh and Nathan were probably the only guests. The bride’s mother, Banu, was a secondary-school classmate and they had remained close friends. They were the only three Indian students in the Form 6 Arts class. So what started as a form of security for the three Indians gradually grew into a long friendship. They got to know Banu’s husband, Seelan, over the years. First, he seemed a little distant from his wife’s male bachelor friends. But he soon warmed up over beer, commando chips and gin rummy.

They loved Banu’s fiery commando chips, something she had picked up from a chef from her father’s social and recreational club. The three of them used to go there for a weekly lunch at the club. Banu could sign for the food through her father’s membership. Manoh and Nathan had their own private joke about the underwear-less hot spicy chips stir fried with anchovies. This weekend there



will be no gin rummy. There certainly will be a free flow of beer, but commando chips won't be served either.

Banu had already organised the sleeping arrangements for them. Krish and wife would be in a room and the remaining three guests in their own rooms. Nathan was glad to be on his own. They were all left on their own till dinner and then to a good night's rest before the very early morning wedding ceremony at the biggest Hindu temple in Kuantan, the next day.

The dinner was a lavish event. Banu had ordered food from the most popular and expensive Indian food caterers in town. An aromatic array of southern and northern Indian cuisine assaulted their senses. A whole roasted lamb was the main attraction for every discerning Indian palate. This would be quite a contrast to the vegetarian food that would be served at the temple the following morning. At some point during the meal, just about everyone would have made their way to the roasted lamb, even the cholesterol-laden guests.

Santhu was inseparable from Manoh from the time they arrived. They sat next to each other, still sharing a head-phone set. Nathan knew exactly what Manoh was doing. The young lad was unaware, enjoying the attention from the older man. There were a few young people at the dinner but Santhu showed no interest to mingle with them. Anyway, they, too, seemed to have found cliques of their own.

After the meal, each of them made their way to their rooms. Manoh yearned to spend the night with Santhu. He decided he would lay the foundations for future explorations during this weekend. He went to Santhu's room and knocked on the door. A shirtless Santhu greeted him.

"Hi Uncle Manoh. Anything?"

"I was wondering if you want to listen to some music in my room? It's a big bed and it's comfortable enough for two."



Quite excited at the prospect of spending more time with Manoh, Santhu closed the door behind him and followed Manoh. A few minutes later, Saras wanting to check how her son had settled in for the night, came by and found his room empty. She guessed that he might be with Manoh. On her second knock, Manoh opened the door and she saw Santhu sitting on the bed.

“I thought I’d find you here. Don’t stay up too late. We have an early morning tomorrow. Manoh, don’t spoil him. He needs his sleep,” she said and left.

“Good night, Amma,” Santhu called after her.

Manoh closed the door and went back to the bed and put on the other earphone. After a few songs Manoh asked Santhu if he wanted to sleep in Manoh’s room. We can continue listening to songs and fall asleep. Santhu agreed. Manoh suggested that they strip down to their underwear and get comfortable. Manoh was surprised to see that Santhu wore white briefs. His mother is still buying his underwear, Manoh thought. For Manoh, white underwear was impractical and it had gone out of fashion a couple of decades ago. He kept his thoughts to himself.

“These are good songs, Uncle Manoh.”

“No need to call me Uncle when you are alone with me. Call me Manoh. I don’t mind.”

Santhu didn’t say anything. He had always called Manoh “uncle” as that was how his Amma had told Santhu to address Manoh.

After a while, Santhu slipped under the light blanket and began to doze off. Manoh looked at Santhu for a long time. He took the earphones off Santhu’s ear and the young man turned on his side, facing away from Manoh. Manoh slowly manoeuvred Santhu to lie on his back again. Manoh moved his head towards Santhu’s groin. Manoh saw the slight bulge in Santhu’s underwear. He closed his eyes and moved his face toward his target to inhale the odour of the



boy. Suddenly, he stopped. His mind flashed back a scene that had once plagued him, many times before, even after the source of his misery had gone away from their home. What had started as play and a secret only the two shared turned to revulsion. It was all very exciting in the beginning. He knew he was doing something forbidden but Devi *Akka* had started it and he did not want to refuse her. Soon it became frequent and he felt used but could not stop her. She frightened him to believing that she would tell his mother that he had been a naughty boy and done things to her. For a few years this scene returned to torment him. It only faded away a few years ago. He had since forgotten all about it. Now, as the scene played out in his mind, he saw himself again under the family dining table. A long table cloth is hanging very low, almost covering the table legs. He is under the table. He sees her legs. She's standing ironing clothes. Her legs are parted. He senses her impatience. He moves forward. He knows what is expected of him. As if in a trance he raises the table cloth and her short skirt. There is no obstacle. He moves his head forward and he can smell her womanliness. He begins and hears her moan. He knows when he can stop.

Manoh pulled his head back in a start. He lay awake on his pillow, afraid to close his eyes.

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It was still dark outside when everyone came downstairs. The dawn wedding ceremony was set at an auspicious time and they had to get to the temple soon. Manoh was dressed in a new black khurta top with a black bottom for the wedding. "Another khurta set bought from Fabindia?" Nathan asked. Manoh gave no reply.

Nathan looked fondly at Manoh. He couldn't help thinking how handsome Manoh looked. He looked as attractive as when Nathan had first met him. Nathan



quickly killed the thought. “That way madness lies,” Nathan muttered a line from his Form 6 Shakespeare class to himself, and walked behind Manoh.

“Hope the night went well.”

Again, another silence.

Manoh did not return the expected smile. Nathan wondered what had happened. He dropped the subject. They got into the waiting car and left for the temple. Everyone was back in the same seats as the day before.

The wedding ceremony proceeded like clock-work. Everyone there was in the best attire and the women were decked in gold. And as expected, all these jewellerys will be returned to the safe boxes in the banks the next day. Now, all eyes were on the bride and groom on the dais. The wedding ceremony climaxed with the groom tying the *thali* around the bride’s neck that was already bedecked with an elaborate gold necklace and gold chains. The incessant sounds from the *nathaswaram* and the beating of *tavil* drums rang out.

Manoh remained his unusually quiet, new self, only making brief small talk with acquaintances seated near him. He only spoke briefly, when spoken to. He had not bitched about a single person or commented on any of the young men looking fabulous in their traditional Indian outfits. Nathan was bored. He shifted his attention to the eye-candy among the guests. He didn’t know anyone here. The attractive younger men Manoh normally relished on seem to have lost their appeal this morning and Santhu didn’t seem to be the cause, either. Santhu was seated next to Manoh paying no attention to the ceremony or Manoh but lost in his mobile phone.

Now a grand Indian vegetarian breakfast of *thosai*, *idly*, *poori*, *vadai* and Indian sweetmeats lay before the guests. With so much to go round, meat was not missed and Nathan, certainly did not miss it, having not tasted it since birth. This was a family tradition he had never complained about. The guests also knew



that the wedding dinner which will follow in a few hours will out-do what they had the night before.

The day of the wedding had gone by fast. During the dinner, both Nathan and Manoh were kept busy by some familiar faces. No one asked them when it would be their turn to marry. They had both gone past what was considered the marriageable age and being husband material. The aunties and uncles had moved on to other younger grooms-to-be they could hound.

Nathan watched Manoh talking to one of the young men among the dinner guests. They had met him in another wedding a few months ago. Nathan knew that Manoh had met him before for sex. Sitting among other guests, Nathan noticed Manoh leave the room and the young man followed him.

Once in the room, the young man unzipped Manoh's pants and pulled out his cock. Manoh closed his eyes and was lost in the pleasure he was receiving. Once done, he pulled up his pants which lay around his ankles and gently kissed the young man on his lips. "Glad to see you again, let's go back to the crowd before we are missed," he said sweetly. While walking back to the main dinner area, Manoh sighed relief. He felt he still had it in him. He hadn't lost his touch. He wondered what had happened to him the night before.

Nathan knew that Manoh will give him a detailed account if anything had transpired the night before and a short while ago, when time permitted. All the socialising and eating sent them to their beds by midnight, even as the last guests drove out the house gates. Manoh was exhausted by early evening, not having slept properly the night before, soon he was sound asleep.

By mid-morning they were bidding a very tired Banu and Seelan their goodbyes. The bride and groom were still in the bridal suite that had been set up in one of the many rooms in the house. "Our highway traffic is heavy and unpredictable during the weekends. It is best we arrive in KL by early afternoon," Krish announced, apologising for their early departure. The drive back was very much like the drive from Kuala Lumpur. After about three hours, Krish dropped



them off at Manoh's apartment. Everyone shook hands except Manoh who gave Santhu a warm hug and said his goodbye. As the car drove off, Nathan could not wait any longer.

As soon as they entered Manoh's house, "Tell me, la, what happened? Two nights and nothing to report?" Nathan burst out.

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Nathan was not surprised with the details that Manoh gave about his brief encounter with the young man during the wedding dinner. But he found it unbelievable that nothing had happened between Manoh and Santhu the night before. It was totally out of character for Manoh, Nathan thought. How strange! How un-Manoh-like! Nathan knew that if anything had transpired, even if Santhu had given him a chaste peck on his cheeks, Manoh would not have held back. He never lost an opportunity to boast of a sexual conquest.

Manoh had not fully recovered from what had happened on the first night in Kuantan. He thought it was all in the past. Something within him had triggered it to re-surface. It had lain silent for so long he thought it was gone. Why it had returned to haunt him now, he didn't know. The sleeping demon seemed to have awakened. His quick sexual escapade during the wedding dinner was like old times. But every time his thoughts strayed to Santhu, he felt his old fear and his mind played out the scene he was trapped in.

Manoh could not understand what was happening to him. He was not doing something he had not done before. There had been many men from whom he had got what he had wanted, and in many different ways. From the seemingly innocent get the men drunk approach so they are completely relaxed he could have his way with them to the most exploitative. Once Manoh had given an uncooperative young man a cup of coffee with a small dose of Valium mixed in



it. The unsuspecting young man soon fell asleep and Manoh delighted on him. He had gone on to take photos of the young man in slumber, fully unclothed waist downwards. Nathan was one of the beneficiaries of these semi-naked photos. Manoh had not stopped to consider the implications of his actions. When Nathan told him, Manoh just laughed it off, “It’s for my collection.” What he had planned to do with Santhu that night was nothing near to what he had done before. He merely wanted to gently touch Santhu and lay his face on Santhu’s cock and inhale deeply while giving release to his already hard cock.

Manoh broke his silence and told Nathan. “You’re gonna be surprised, man. Nothing happened. I had got both of us down to our underwear and somehow I just could not go any further. I just watched Santhu sleep and then finally dozed off. Such an anti-climax after all that planning. I think I need to see a doctor,” Manoh said, a little distracted. Exactly for what purpose, Manoh did not say.