

S J S I N D U

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## Fundraising

**T**he tsunami brought peace to Toronto. Almost everyone I knew had lost somebody—to the waters, to the chaos, or just to the unknowing. My mother sat next to the phone all day, waiting for a call. Kannan told me that his mother was no different. Even we boys felt lethargic. No one could get the energy to fight, or even to patrol the neighborhood. The other gangs were the same, if Toronto news was anything to go by. A rare ceasefire, news outlets were calling it, a brief bout of peace on the dangerous streets of Scarborough.

Most days we sat catatonic on Kannan's couch, not knowing what to do, watching the BBC's coverage of Sri Lanka.

"What we need is cash," Kannan said.

A news anchor with shiny blonde hair was telling us that the Sri Lankan government had asked for foreign aid.

"Those assholes are never going to give the money to Tamils," Kannan said. By assholes, he meant the Sri Lankan government.

We nodded. We knew this was true. We also knew that most foreign donations weren't cash—clothes that were too scandalous for the Sri Lankan women to wear, toys that weren't important enough to distribute, electronics that wouldn't work without a transformer—and all these things were gathering dust in warehouses and clogging up the shipping and transport systems. Any money would line the pockets of the Sri Lankan president and his family. Some of it would go to helping relief efforts in the Sinhalese areas. None of it would be for Tamil people.

"We should raise money," Kannan said. "We're good at that."

We nodded, but no one moved, no one said anything. For a week we'd been watching footage of bodies streaming down flooded streets, temples cracked open like coconuts, cement wells pushed up out of the ground and lying on their sides in the sand. Next to this ruthless nature, our daily violences of gang life looked small and petty.

Kannan's grandmother hobbled into the room.

"I made tea," she said.

She shoed Kannan into the kitchen to pour us tea in small ceramic cups.

"You young people should be doing something." She gestured at the TV. "They need cash, not viewers."

So we started to raise money. We took investments from Tamil businesses in Scarborough to lift up the people back home. At Muthu's DVDs and Music, the owner refused to donate anything.

"You're thugs," he said. "Nothing more than boys." He spit on the ground.

This was as per usual. Kannan nodded to me, as usual, and I, as usual, pushed a pistol into the owner's gut, which, as usual, was enough to convince him. Sometimes, to make a point, we made people give us double the usual.

We posted up near the Hindu temple in Richmond and stopped the women going in and out. We demanded their gold jewelry.

"This is for the Tamils back home," we said. "Think of them. Your prayers are worth nothing if you don't contribute."

They handed us their gold chains, pulled the bangles off their wrists, unscrewed their heavy earrings.

"Thank you," we said.

When they were gone, we sorted the jewelry in the van: real gold and costume jewelry. The costume jewelry pile was three times as large.

"Those old hags," Kannan said. He put his face in his hands and laughed.

At the end of the week, we'd only raised five thousand dollars. And so Kannan called his guy, who called another guy, who called another, and a few hours later, a car pulled up in front of Kannan's apartment building with one pound of pure cocaine.

Problem was, we had no idea how to cut or sell coke. Coke was the Jamaican gang's thing. We went to the corners of Jane and Finch, where they sold. That was our territory, but we'd always had an alliance saying they could sell here, since

police ignored the area. But now here we were, about to ask them to teach us how to get in on their biggest moneymaker.

There were four of us plus Kannan, and only three Jamaican boys, one on our side of the street and two across the way. Kannan approached the bald Jamaican boy leaning with his foot up on the side of a covered bus stop.

“Where’s Jay-Jay?” Kannan asked.

We all held our guns close under our heavy winter jackets.

“Fuck you,” the boy said. He watched the cars passing instead of us.

Kannan stepped up to him, pulling back his jacket to show his gun. “You’re on our turf, blackie. We need to talk to Jay-Jay.”

The boy fingered his own gun behind his back. “Jay-Jay got moved.”

I tapped Kannan on the elbow, which was our code that he needed to calm down. He zipped his jacket back up.

“We need to talk to Jay-Jay,” he said.

The boy took out his phone and dialed someone. He talked in a fast dialect I couldn’t catch, hung up, and said, “Jay-Jay’s coming.”

We waited, us and the Jamaican boys. We all watched each other and no one moved.

A half hour later, a car pulled up and Jay-Jay got out—a tiny, dark man with a lopsided afro.

He greeted Kannan with a handshake. “This must be important,” he said. They’d been friends once, back in seventh grade.

“We’re raising money for the tsunami victims,” Kannan said. “We need your boys to train our boys on how to cut and sell.”

The bald boy who’d been the first one at the bus stop got up in Kannan’s face. “You don’t need shit,” he said.

Kannan pushed him back.

The boy roared and rushed at Kannan, but Jay-Jay got in the way.

“Calm the fuck down,” Jay-Jay said.

But Kannan kept pushing the boy, pushing and pushing until Jay-Jay drew his gun.

Before he could even aim, Kannan grabbed ahold of Jay-Jay’s head and slammed him down onto the concrete. The boy, too shocked to respond, backed himself into the corner of the glass bus stop.

Kannan kneeled next to Jay-Jay. We held our breaths until the blood leaked out of Jay-Jay’s head, and then we ran, scattered like leaves.

Later that day, we sat in Kannan's living room and watched BBC coverage of the tsunami.

Kannan's grandmother brought out tea in little mismatched cups for everyone. I drank mine in a glass that had yellow flowers on it, trying not to let my hand shake too much.

"How did your fundraising go?" she asked.

We all watched Kannan, waited.

"Not good enough," Kannan said.

She patted his arm. "You'll do better next time," she said.

When she was gone, Kannan said to me, "I want one of you posted in this building at all hours. And double up the gun stock in my room." He closed his eyes and I guessed he was seeing Jay-Jay on the ground. "This peace won't last."

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**SJ SINDU'S** debut novel, *Marriage of a Thousand Lies*, is forthcoming in 2017 from Soho Press. She was a 2013 Lambda Literary Fellow and her hybrid fiction and nonfiction chapbook, *I Once Met You But You Were Dead*, was the winner of the 2016 Split Lip Turnbuckle Chapbook Contest. Sindu's creative writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Brevity*, *The Normal School*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *apt*, *Vinyl Poetry*, *PRISM International*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *rkvry quarterly*, and elsewhere.