

CHAPTER 9

The final answer

Jamal had become big news. As evening arrived, a large crowd had appeared outside the police station.

A TV reporter was talking straight to camera. 'Behind these walls lies the mystery all India is talking about. Did Jamal Malik, an uneducated eighteen-year-old boy from the slums of Mumbai, cheat or did he win fairly? And in the crowds all around me, there is an even bigger question: will he be back tonight to play for twenty million rupees?'

In a large house on the other side of the city, crime boss Javed was listening to these words on the news. He didn't recognise the photo of the boy who had pretended to be a new cook in his kitchen.

Several other people were in the dark room, lit only by the television screen – a few of Javed's men and their girlfriends. The only people there who recognised Jamal were Latika and Salim.

Javed changed the channel to one with pop music. He and one of the girls began dancing. He wanted to have a party, not watch a stupid television programme.

Latika took the chance to leave the room quietly. Salim followed and found her watching television in a different room. On one side of her face was a long scar to remind her of that day at the VT Station. A tear ran down it now as she listened to the news about Jamal.

'That guy,' said Salim from the door. 'He will never give up.' He smiled and shook his head. 'Never.'

To Latika, Salim was no more than one of Javed's men. And so it was a shock when he held something out to her – car keys.



'Go,' said Salim.

'But ...'

'Just drive. There won't be another chance.'

Latika took the keys.

'He will kill you,' she said.

But Salim had made his decision. 'I'll take care of Javed.'

Latika looked at the open door. Fear ate at her heart. 'I can't.'

'You have to,' said Salim, putting his mobile phone into her hand. He brushed the hair away from her scar. 'And for what I've done, please forgive me.'

'Have a good life,' Salim said quietly as she ran out to the car.

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The crowd outside the studio was huge – everybody wanted to see Jamal, to be a part of history. The cheers grew louder when the police van arrived with Jamal in the back. The people closest to the van reached out, wanting to get near to the millionaire *chai-wallah*.

'Good luck!'

'We love you, Jamal!'

He looked out at the blinding lights and the sea of people all around him. It was time to face his destiny.

* * *

All around the city, people crowded in front of televisions. At the call centre, the desks were empty. In the streets, crowds stood in front of television shop windows.

They all watched as the programme's music started and Prem Kumar led Jamal back out into the studio to the cheers of the crowd.

Prem smiled into the camera. 'Welcome back to *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*!' He turned to Jamal. 'I can safely say that tonight is the biggest night of both our lives. You can walk away with ten million rupees, or you can take the biggest chance in television history and go

for the final question – and an amazing twenty million rupees! So ... are you ready for that question?'

'Yes.'

The air in the studio felt electric as the lights went down. Prem looked at the question on the card in his hands. 'Are you a big reader, Jamal?'

'I can read.' There was some nervous laughter from the audience.

When silence returned, Prem read out the final question:

In Alexander Dumas' book *The Three Musketeers*, two of the musketeers are called Athos and Porthos. What was the name of the third musketeer?

-A: Aramis

-B: Cardinal Richelieu

-C: D'Artagnan

-D: Planchet

Jamal couldn't help laughing. He remembered that day all those years ago when their teacher had called him and his brother 'the two musketeers'. He remembered telling Salim, when they first met Latika, that she could be the third musketeer to their Athos and Porthos! That's how he had viewed the three of them once – 'the three musketeers', always together.

'He's smiling,' Prem told the audience. 'I guess you know the answer, Jamal.'

Jamal continued to smile. 'Would you believe it? I don't.' He didn't seem to care.

'You don't know?' asked Prem. 'So you're going to take the ten million and walk?'

'No,' said Jamal. 'I'll play.'

The audience let out a shocked sound.

'Let me remind you,' said Prem. 'If you get the answer

wrong, you lose *everything ...*'

Jamal took a breath. 'I'd like to use my last lifeline and Phone-A-Friend.'

Now that Jamal had said these words, there was no turning back: he had to play.

The sound of a telephone came over the studio speakers as the computer put the call through.

'It's ringing,' said Prem. 'Who is it?'

'It's my brother's mobile phone.'

The phone continued to ring.

'Maybe he's gone for a walk,' said Jamal.

'Is he the kind of brother who'd go for a walk on a twenty-million rupee question?' smiled Prem.

Jamal shook his head uncertainly. 'It's the only number I know.'

* * *

Latika had driven as fast as she could to get into the city. For the first time in years, she felt sure about what she was doing – she wanted to be with Jamal, the only person she had ever loved. But the closer she came to the television studio, the worse the traffic became. Realising that she would never get there in time, she parked the car and ran out into the street. She joined a group of people outside the window of a television shop.

When she heard the final question, she too let out a surprised laugh. She watched as the computer called Jamal's Phone-A-Friend number. Like everyone else, she waited.

Suddenly she realised – Salim could not answer because he had given his mobile phone to her! But she had left it in the car! She turned and ran back to the parked car as quickly as she could. She only hoped that she wasn't too late.



* * *

In the studio, Prem was shaking his head. 'Nobody is answering. You're alone, Jamal.' Behind the cameras, one of the programme's producers was getting ready to end the call.

But then suddenly a woman's voice answered the phone. 'Jamal?'

'I'm guessing,' said Prem, '*that* isn't your brother. Who is this?'

'My name is Latika.'

Jamal had to stop himself from jumping up, laughing, dancing. Latika! He didn't know how she had got Salim's phone or why she was answering. He didn't care!

'Well, Latika, let's be clear,' said Prem. 'Jamal is going to read you the final question again. You have twenty seconds ... '

* * *

When he heard Latika's name on TV, Javed called for silence. Anger rose inside him.

'Latika!' he shouted, knowing that there would be no answer. His thoughts raced. Where had she gone?

'Salim!' he shouted.

There was no answer. Salim had locked himself in the bathroom. Here he took a bag of Javed's money and emptied it into the bath. He looked down at all the money and thought of all the pain that had been its price. He knew that he had been a part of it.

It was too late to save himself, but he could still save Jamal and Latika. He took out his gun and waited.

* * *

'Latika, is that really you?' asked Jamal.

'Yes,' she said, happily

'The question, Jamal, the question!' said Prem urgently.

Jamal quickly read out the question to Latika.

'Fifteen seconds left!' said Prem.

'Where are you?' Jamal asked.

'I'm safe,' replied Latika.

'Ten seconds! Latika, what do you think?'

There was a pause and then Latika said, 'I don't know. I've never known.' She gave a surprised laugh, full of shared memories. Jamal thought back to the night that he had first met Latika, when they were seven years old. He remembered how he had persuaded Salim to let her be the third musketeer. So much had happened since then, but he had never stopped thinking about her.

And then the twenty seconds were over. Latika's voice was cut off.



'Jamal, you really are on your own,' said Prem. 'Your final answer, for twenty million rupees?' Jamal did not know the answer and there was nobody to help him. But he did not look worried as he said, 'My answer is A.'

'Because?'

Jamal smiled. 'Just ... *because*.' He had no other explanation to offer.

Prem asked the computer to show the final answer. He looked down at the screen for a long time. Everybody in the studio held their breath; it seemed that the whole world was holding its breath.

'Jamal Malik,' said Prem, 'call-centre *chai-wallah* from Mumbai ... for twenty million rupees ... you answered A. I have to tell you that is ...' He paused. The seconds felt like years, and then, '... THE RIGHT ANSWER!'



The crowd were up on their feet, cheering and cheering. Jamal had won! He'd won more money than anybody in television history! But Jamal wasn't thinking about the money – he was thinking about the voice on the phone.

* * *

Javed was banging on the bathroom door.

'Salim! Open this door! Salim!'

His men behind him had their guns ready. One of them ran at the door with his shoulder. As soon as it was open, they ran inside.

Salim was waiting with a sad smile on his face. He was sitting in a bath full of bank notes. He began to shoot at the men, and Javed was the first to fall.



But then the boss's men were shooting back. Salim was hit again and again. His head fell back onto the money. With his last breath, he whispered, 'God is great.'

* * *

Mumbai's VT Station was quiet at this time of night. Jamal sat alone, hardly able to believe what had happened. The end of the show had been like a dream – the cheers of the crowd, Prem's hand on his shoulder, the huge cheque for twenty million rupees. Twenty million rupees! He had more money now than he had ever imagined.

But money was not what Jamal was looking for. He only wanted one thing, and he had spent most of his life chasing it. He wanted to be with Latika. As soon as the show was over, he had come here, to the old meeting place.

He looked up now and could hardly believe his eyes. She was here, on the platform opposite, where she stood, looking around uncertainly.

Jamal knew that he could never let her go again. Latika saw him as he began to cross the platforms. And then they were together at last.

'I thought we'd meet again only in death,' said Latika.

'I knew you'd watch the programme,' said Jamal.

He reached out to touch her face. She could not look at him when he saw the long scar on her cheek. But Jamal just kissed the scar gently. He felt that all his life had been leading up to this one perfect moment.

'This is our destiny,' he said.



EPILOGUE

In the biggest quiz programme on Indian television, Jamal Malik has won twenty million rupees. How did he do it?

-A:

-B:

-C:

-D: It is his destiny.