

# A Girl in Traffick

**A Girl in Traffick**  
A Novel

**Mamta Jain Valderrama**

Majavii Press  
Los Angeles, CA

Copyright 2016 © by Mamta Jain Valderrama

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced, scanned, distributed in any printed or electronic form, or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2016.

ISBN: 0692788883

ISBN 13: 978-0-692-78888-2

Majavii Press

Los Angeles, California

[www.Majavii.com](http://www.Majavii.com)

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

To Arlo—while you patiently wait for a kidney transplant.

For the victims of organ trafficking around the world—past, present, and future—and for the activists who work tirelessly to protect them.

## Contents

Part One: Juhi

Part Two: Kevin

Part Three: Slum Life

Part Four: Redemption

About the Author

Book Club Discussion Questions

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to my husband, Steve, who supported my decision to quit my job and write full time. He pushed me to (finally after thirty-seven years) discover the intersection between joy and skill. To our daughter, who shared her first year of life with the birth of this book. Thanks to my parents for giving me the freedom to study journalism when *all* the other Indian students went to medical school, law school, and engineering school. To my sister, Samta Varia, for her continuous support. To my mother-in-law, Sandra Valderrama, who said the story of organ trafficking needs to be told to the world. Without my book club, this novel would not exist. Thanks to Katherine Vogt, Celia Adelson, and Jill Paider. Thanks to my West Coast family for their unwavering support and encouragement: Ranjit Koshy Mathews, Johanna Jacob Kuruvilla, and Dhruv Jacob Mathews; Christopher James Alexander; and Sachin Jain. To the beta readers who made my book better: Jaymin Patel, Brendan Docherty, Sue Paider, Sharon Yikanen, Caitlin Gremminger, Kiran Srivastava, and Laurie Bryan. Sincere thanks to nephrologist and fellow new mom, Dr. Mandana Rastegar, MD, for your clinical expertise. Finally, heartfelt thanks to Nancy Fulton, founder of Nancy Fulton Meetups, whose invaluable teachings propelled me forward.

## Chapter 1: A New Life

Juhi hoisted herself onto the oversized sofa in Kevin's Santa Monica apartment. When she sat completely against the back, her toes barely stretched to the ground. At fifteen years old and five feet tall, she was petite in America, and she was even considered short in her native country, India. Her body had developed nicely. She was a beautiful young woman; her thin frame bulged only in her feminine parts. She would not gain more height, but Juhi didn't mind. She was content with her small stature—it was easier to find hiding holes and sleeping cells in the shadowy alleys of India's slums, where she'd lived for the last three years. During that time, before her recent move to the United States, Juhi had mastered the art of making herself invisible. It was difficult to hide in the slums, especially when the Delhi sun shone down on her stunning face.

As a slum dweller, her beauty set her apart from everyone else. Juhi was one of the most beautiful girls in all of India, even after she had not bathed for weeks. During her time in the slums, Juhi endured long stares and pointed fingers in her direction. She despised the strangers who stopped in their tracks to admire her as if an angel walked among them. She could not recall a time when she felt like an angel. Her hardened interior mismatched her alluring exterior, which was marked by a long mane of thick, black, unbreakable hair. It swayed behind her head in perfect congruence like a fresh coat of glossy paint on a new car.

Her dark-chocolate skin was supple, yet marred. Where she came from, a lighter complexion was more coveted. Her own mother, and other women in her village, constantly reminded her, "You are beautiful even though you are dark." Juhi thought she was beautiful *because* she was dark.

She had a broad forehead, which drew more attention to her face. It led to her full eyebrows that were formed naturally with a slight arch. Her narrow nose had a point that gently leaned to the right, which made her face a tiny bit asymmetrical but only to the most observant admirer. Her nose made her already slender face look even slimmer. Her pink lips pursed at the center and covered her bone-white teeth. Her smile drove men mad, so she stopped smiling a long time ago. But more than her smile, it was her eyes that mesmerized and captivated friends and foreigners alike. Under her seemingly meter-long eyelashes lay almond-shaped hazel green eyes that glistened by the light of the sun and the moon. She once heard a man describe her eyes as the two most magnificent green-tinted Koh-i-Noor diamonds.

Since early childhood, her classmates, her parents' friends, and people she didn't know shouted to her, "Aishwarya! Aishwarya!" after the Bollywood actress and former Miss World, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. Aishwarya was famous for her green eyes, but Juhi abhorred the nickname. She didn't like the attention. But the label stuck to her like gum on the bottom of a shoe—until she moved to the United States. When Juhi lived in the Delhi slums, fellow slum dwellers gave her another nickname. They called her "Afghan Girl" after the refugee in the famous *National Geographic* photograph by Steve McCurry. It shocked Juhi that even the most uneducated and destitute people of India recognized that photograph from 1985. Slum dwellers called her that to remind Juhi that she was a penniless orphan. The women who were most jealous of her beauty taunted her and accompanied their verbal assaults with vulgar gestures.

When Juhi lived in the slums, she wished she could hide under a scarf like the Afghan girl. Before her body changed from a girl's to a woman's, her face was already irresistible to men. After her thirteenth birthday, two perfect breasts formed as juicy and pink as the first ripe cantaloupes of the season. Her high, curved backside filled her *salwar kameez* just so its frame

was slightly visible. In her presence, practically all men and teenage boys degenerated into animals in heat. The only exception had been her father, who cherished Juhi and his wife—Juhi's mother—more than anything else in the world.

As memories of her past filled her mind, she flipped on the flat-screen television, which filled half of the living room, and turned the channel to the cable news station. The reporter talked about a new tunnel that connected Europe and Asia through something called the Bosphorus Strait. Juhi wished that her own story was the topic of the day. Her parents' photo would take over the screen with the channel's logo in the bottom right corner. Above their photo, they would show today's date: October 29, 2013. The handsome news anchor would refer to her as "India's Harriet Tubman."

But Juhi had never met this news anchor, or any journalist. In fact, her new father, Kevin—the man who adopted her—promised her she would get to tell her story to the media. But she had arrived in the United States three weeks ago. The journalists and pundits told her story on television as if they had lived it themselves. Where they got their information, she didn't know. All she knew was that it wasn't her side of the story, and none of the news was about her parents. Less than one month ago, she was plucked from her native country and transplanted to America. Her parents were murdered in India. Back home, she had no family—no siblings, no grandparents, and no aunts or uncles—and there was a bounty on her head. New Delhi's most notorious crime lord hunted all over India for her, and he would not stop until he found her. Yet India was her home—the only place she had ever known. It held her best and worst memories. *Hindustan* was where her parents were, even if they were dead. Now, in Los Angeles, she was halfway around the world from them—nine thousand miles away and twenty-four whole hours of flying time. Even time zones told her she was left behind in the shadow of their past. The clock on the television read "10:00 a.m., October 29, 2013," but at that exact moment it was already ten thirty in the evening that same day in New Delhi.

No matter how much she longed for India, she knew she would never be safe there again. Video footage of her former captor flashed across the television screen. The slumlord, Sunardas Shetty, was handcuffed and bowed his head to hide from the cameras. At least a dozen police officers escorted him. Even though he was a prisoner, his vast network of gangs and criminals would still hunt for Juhi. With the help of her drawings, she had cast a spotlight on criminal masterminds throughout Delhi and perhaps all of India. They would seek revenge. As much as they thirsted for her body, they also thirsted for her blood.

She was not safe in India, but she didn't feel safe in the United States either. Juhi had a lingering feeling that one day, once the journalists forgot about her, the devils of India's underworld would turn up at her new Los Angeles home. If they had to, they would chase her across the globe. Kevin had promised her that would never happen. She thought he was stupid to promise things he knew nothing about.

Just then, on the television, Sunardas Shetty looked directly into the cameras. His yellow, bloodshot eyes looked directly at her, as if he knew she was watching. He smiled ominously and held his hand out as if he would grab her right through the television.

She fumbled for the television remote and pounded the "off" button. She shivered and breathed harder. She tried to erase the image from her mind, but she saw his face everywhere, even when she closed her eyes. The hatred in his expression, the determined gaze to find her and to kill her... Kevin couldn't protect her from the images in her mind. She curled into a ball on the couch and wrapped her arms around her small frame.



Since her arrival in the United States, she was forced to meet with dozens of social workers, caseworkers, and politicians. They lied to her, every one of them. They promised her that if she let Kevin adopt her, and if she gave her entire folio of evidence to the Americans, her real parents would get justice. The Americans promised her that Mummy and Papa would be honored and memorialized. They promised Juhi that the world would hear her parents' tragic story. Juhi grew weary of waiting for that time to come. So far, the brand-new "wonderful American life" that Kevin wanted to give her was nothing short of miserable.

Her mind drifted back to happier times in India, when Kevin interrupted her on the couch.

"Good morning, Juhi." He sat next to her but careful not to touch her.

She turned her mouth up in an obligatory grin and looked away.

"Big day today," he said and smiled.

Juhi stirred in her seat. Kevin searched her expression for any hint of emotion. She was a steel trap, and at times it tested Kevin's patience. The harder he tried to connect with her, the less Juhi shared. But he was determined to show his fatherly affection, even if she didn't believe that.

"This you say one week ago," Juhi replied in broken English and a thick Indian accent.

"I know you were upset after we met with the congressional committee, Juhi. I'm sorry. I want to make it right."

Juhi stared out the window.

"Are you nervous?"

Juhi shook her head no, but Kevin saw fear in her eyes.

"Good, then!" he said with too much enthusiasm, attempting to lighten the mood. "Your pant suit is in your room. Why don't you start getting ready? And by the time you're done, breakfast will be here."

Juhi hopped off the couch and went to her room. As she closed the door, she glanced back at Kevin, who already held the receiver to his ear.

"Three orders of fresh fruit, one basket of pastries, and a pot of coffee," he said into the phone.

That was the closest Kevin would come to cooking. He ordered most of his meals and had them delivered to his home. Juhi's most prized memories with her mother were made in the kitchen. She longed to be back in her village, making *dal cheela* (lentil pancakes) spiced with fresh ginger-green chili-garlic paste, and cumin and mustard seeds, sizzling over a drizzle of oil. Mummy added a surprise ingredient—fennel, which gave each cheela a touch of sweetness that balanced the savory flavors. She missed her mummy hunched over the stove, filling the whole house with steam. In that moment, she wanted nothing more than to sip a cup of masala chai with Mummy and Papa.