

# THE ROOT OF LOVE



RUMMAN R KALAM

"I don't think you know how potatoes work, Mr. Masum," I tried explaining to the bespectacled man for the umpteenth time.

"No, you don't get it. Potatoes can power things. If we can amass enough potatoes under the guise of agriculture, we can gradually become a company as revolutionary as Tesla!"

Masum's gesturing, obsessive smiles and suppressed voice would be enough for my parents to think that he is really into me and I was right, judging by the innocent peeks from them across the lawn.

"What are your hobbies? I'd like to know what you do in your free time," I tried changing the topic.

"I am a DIY nut," he laughed, "I like nuts." He kept on chuckling to himself.

*I am in the presence of a mad man. My parents want me to marry someone whose life revolves around a tuber.*

"So, what did you make so far?" I asked, knowing what the answer will be.

"It all started with a science project. You know the light bulb from a potato? Soon enough, I had a potato cannon, a potato camera and a potato PC to go along with the set," he replied, nodding like he was trying to loosen whatever screws were left unloose.

"A potato camera?"

"Yes, it's a pinhole camera I made specifically to photograph potatoes in their various stages. I use it to document the growth process of my beloved potatoes. You'll know once you get to see my exhibition. This is unforeseen, it's potato art." He stopped nodding and froze.

This time, he opened and closed his mouth a few times, looking around as if he isn't sure what he wants to say. I decided to wait for him and whatever crazy potato story that's gonna come next.

The words were slow to form and said with deliberation as if they were being peeled off a rather stubborn dictionary.

"Maybe you could be the first one to take pictures... with my potatoes," said Masum as he looked into my eyes for the first time that day.

I stared back at him.

He stared back at me.

The parents stared at us.

"You... want me to... take pictures with your potatoes? Like pose next to them?" My mouth fell slightly open at the ridiculous invitation.

I usually have to play along to these until I can go back to classes in London and forget about my family's obsession with their bloodline but this guy really is one hell of a piece of work.

"I... am really sorry. I must have misread your interest," there was a slight pause as he looked up at me again before going back to staring at his fidgeting thumbs, "I thought I finally found someone for my potatoes. I am extremely sorry for misunderstanding your politeness. What are your hobbies?"

*He's not that bad after all, maybe. What have I got to lose since I am leaving in a week?*

"I like Hollywood, actually — the whole celebrity culture and the movies and the music. Most people just, y'know, shrug it off as something decadent and sometimes even downright evil. But y'know, different people can have different perspectives," I said, ending

with an embarrassed laugh.

"That's also the impression I had. You seem like someone who knows what they're talking about and you are studying Cultural Anthropology, right?"

"Yeah, I am." *How does he know that? Oh right, my "bio-data". God. This guy is supposed to be an investment banker.*

"Normally, I wouldn't be much concerned but why is it that you're into the whole celebrity culture? I am rather curious about your perspective." The potato crazy in his eyes seemed to have left completely.

"Mostly because of the influence it has on people, really. Celebrity worship has reached such heights that a bunch of them can band together and name any questionable act as a 'challenge' and get millions to do the same. That's just a small example of how potent the cultural grip Hollywood has on us. I just find it intriguing, to be honest."

This guy isn't all that bad, maybe.

"I'm pretty sure you know about Marilyn Monroe, right? She's my favourite, actually," he said as the blood rushed to his cheeks.

"Oh. My. God. Really?! She's my favourite too!" I caught myself get too excited than I should have been in the moment. What's happening?

"Did you know that Marilyn Monroe once did a photo shoot wearing a potato sack?"

This time I couldn't hide my groan from anyone as I buried my face in my hands.

"I think the epitome of beauty is when you can wear a potato sack and make the potato sack look beautiful like she did, y'know. Hey, are you okay?"

*I hope that wasn't his good white shirt that got to taste the full cup of tea.*