LOVE SWIPE BLACKMAIL

Nitish Bhushan

Chapter 35

Shock!

(Six Months into the Future)

Bhanu called up Raaj, “Raaj, where are you?”

From Bhanu’s tone, Raaj knew that this was not just important, but also urgent and ultra-critical.

“Office, Why? What happened?”

“Ravi was trying to reach you, but was unable to get through.”

“I must have been in the basement parking lot, seeing off Suchita. We were discussing something. What happened?”

“Ravi called up. I don’t know what has happened yet, as he did not say anything apart from, ‘*Pick up Raaj and come to my flat, immediately. I will explain everything later.*’ And then he disconnected the call.”

“I am done for the day, anyway. Was planning to meet Simi. But I guess I can join you. Will start in ten minutes. You?”

“I am on my way, already,”

In the next forty-five minutes, they arrived at Ravi’s place. It was clear from Ravi’s tone, during the call with Bhanu that the matter was serious. The seriousness was amplified when they reached his flat and saw him pacing back and forth in the drawing room. Raaj went to the kitchen and fetched three pints from the fridge. Bhanu and Raaj sat on the couch, waiting for Ravi to open up.



“Yaar, it was post lunch in my office when I got a ping. I thought it was a…chuck that. You remember when you made me delete my original profile on Sofu?” he looked at Bhanu.

“Yes,” Bhanu replied.

“Well, someone from the past is back, and with a blast!”

Both Bhanu and Raaj had question marks on their faces.

“You guys remember Mahek, the one who was in Dubai with Vandana?”

“The one you found extremely hot and all?” asked Raaj.

“Yes. Well, she texted me today.”

“Did I not ask you to delete your damn profile?”

“And you know that I did, in front of you both!”

“Then how come?” mumbled Bhanu. “By any chance, did you leave your number with her? I had explicitly told you not to be in touch with her, at all. Why did you?”

“No, I did not. It beats me how she got my number?” Ravi scoffed.

“Beats me too!”

“Okay would you now tell us what she wants?”

“She texted from her number that she wants to meet me. I told her that I don’t want to! She warned me to follow her instructions; otherwise, she would talk to Vandana.”

“What?” screamed, a shocked Bhanu.

“Shucks!” Raaj amplified his volume in disbelief.

“Exactly!”

They were silently gulping down their beers. “This is tough,” Raaj broke the silence. “But didn’t she tell you when she had connected on Sofu that she hadn’t used her profile pic or her name?”

“Yes, she did. So?”

“So you could have just told her that you don’t know who she is, you don’t know who Ravi is, and that someone else had just used your profile pic.”

“It occurred to me later, but by then, it was of no use.”

“Besides,” said Bhanu looking at Raaj, “she directly got to the point. I don’t think she would have bought that lie from you.” Then, turning towards Ravi, he asked, “Can you show me her text?”

Ravi showed them the exchanged texts.

Unknown number – Hi Ravi, how are you doing?

Ravi – Very well, thank you. Who is this?

Unknown number – Mahek. I want to meet up with you.

Ravi – Mahek? Who Mahek?

Mahek – Mahek from Sofu.

Ravi – I do not know any Mahek. Stop playing games.

Mahek – Shall I ask Vandana to allow you to meet with me?

Ravi – Who are you?

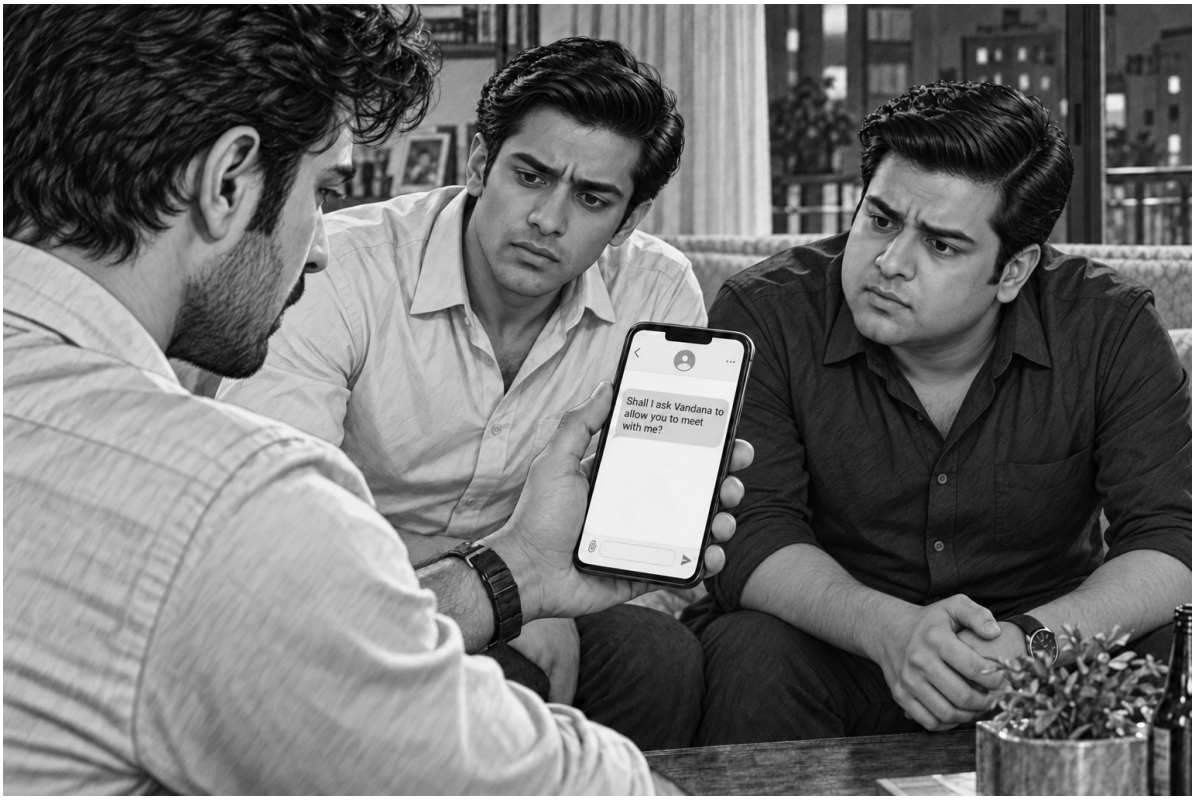
Mahek – That is not important. What is important is that you follow my instructions.

Ravi – What instructions?

Mahek – I will tell you when we meet up.

Ravi – Don’t do this, please.

Mahek – This needs to be done. I will set up a date and time with you. If you keep on following my instructions, you are in safe hands. Good day!



Both Raaj and Bhanu realised the soup that Ravi was in. “I got totally mind-numbed! I can blow my brain on the wall,” said Ravi, “and you guys have any ideas on how I should handle this?”

There was a pin drop silence in the room. Usually, Bhanu was quick in firefighting, but that day, even he was silent. Or was he contemplating?

“Let us take a step back.” said Bhanu in a calm, calculating tone. “You were in touch with her a few months ago. And at that time, you had mentioned your real name on your Sofu profile. You had also used your real picture as a display image. She knew your name then. She even knew your face. Is there any way she could have known then that you were going around with Vandana?”

Ravi was processing what Bhanu alluded to. Raaj was in deep thought.

“But hold on,” continued Bhanu before Ravi could process it, “Had she known it then or had she been a good friend of Vandana, she would have already alerted Vandana! But she did not do

it! That means she is not thick with Vandana. Then why is she reaching out to you now? I mean, what could be the trigger?"

"Valid points, *mishti doi*. In fact, I have a few more thoughts," added Raaj. "If Ravi never gave his number to her, how come she got the same? And why is she reaching out to Ravi now?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ravi.

"Raaj wants to say that Mahek has sourced your number from somewhere or someone else." Bhanu clarified.

"Quite correct," said Raaj. "Have you shared your number on any of the social or professional sites?" he questioned Ravi.

"Um…Nope. I am hundred per cent sure I have not left my number on any of the social media sites."

"How are you so sure, Ravi?"

Turning towards Raaj, Ravi answered, "While you guys were on your way here, this thought did cross my mind that she knew me by face, and also knew me by my name, so I re-checked all my social and professional accounts but did not see my number mentioned anywhere. Also, I googled my number. It shows no reference at all."

"Which means..." Bhanu mulled, "that she indeed sourced your number from someone. Ravi, what have you done to her? It takes a lot to source someone's number and stalk them."

Ravi had been tense due to his message exchange with Mahek; that had somewhat retarded his ability to analyse the situation. Bhanu's and Raaj's line of thinking was getting him somewhere.

"Bhanu I don't remember troubling anyone so much that they would be so motivated to come after me. There's one more thing. How could she have known that I was going around with Vandana? I mean, I never told her that on Sofu."

Now this was a troubling thought, indeed.

"Ok, let's recap what we know and what we don't. And then you can try and fill the blanks, Ravi. I will list down what we know. Raaj will list down what we don't. Is that a fair start?"

Both Ravi and Raaj nodded.

"So, we know that Mahek is Vandana's colleague," started Bhanu, "and we also know that she knows you and Vandana are a couple. She has your number. You did not give her your number. Your number isn't listed anywhere, so she could not have gotten it from social media. Clearly, and if she hasn't gotten your number from somewhere, it means she has got your number from someone. She knows she can hurt you. She wants something from you. In short, she is blackmailing you for something."

“What we don’t know is how she got your number,” started Raaj, “or from whom she got your number, why she wants to meet you, we don’t know her motive—is it sex, is it money, is it both sex and money? If it is none of these, then what? We don’t know how she knows that you and Vandana are going around. She hasn’t yet told you where and when she wants to meet you. Now, that could be because she herself might not have planned that far ahead.”

“Man, this is challenging,” said Bhanu, excited to solve a mystery and also concerned that this was happening in his best friend’s life.

Ravi fell silent after listening to all that. He was thinking, contemplating, and reflecting on what his friends had so far analysed. After a few minutes of silence, he said, “You wanted me to fill the blanks, didn’t you? I cannot think of anything.”

“This is no challenge, Bhanu,” retorted Raaj. “This is calamity.”

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