

KIRANMALA ^{AND THE} KINGDOM BEYOND

THE
CHAOS
CURSE

BOOK THREE

SAYANTANI DASGUPTA

Illustrations by
VIVIENNE TO



SCHOLASTIC PRESS

New York

Copyright © 2020 by Sayantani DasGupta

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Available

ISBN 978-1-338-35589-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 20 21 22 23 24

Printed in the U.S.A. 23
First edition, March 2020

Book design by Abby Denning



CHAPTER 1

I Saved Your Life (Now Say Thank You)

In most folk- and fairy tales, saving someone else's life is a super-big deal. Afterward, there's usually a royal wedding, a vault filled with gold, or some sort of kingdom-wide bouncy-castle party for the rescuer. So after I saved Prince Neelkamal from my evil biological father's underwater demon detention center, it's only natural I expected some sort of extra-special thanks, right?

It's not like I actually thought somebody would present me with my body weight in precious jewels or the keys to the Kingdom Beyond Seven Oceans and Thirteen Rivers or something. (And I didn't want a wedding. I'm only twelve, after all! I mean, gross!) But this wasn't the first time I'd saved my friend Neel's life, and this go-around, I'd traveled across the dimensions in a magic auto rikshaw, risked life and limb,

solved impossible riddles, and fought monsters like a serious shero kick-butt daredevil. And what did I get for all my trouble? Bubkes. Seriously. Like, nada, zilch, zippo, nothing.

I'm not saying this to be greedy, but to explain why, when I saw the fancy royal party gathered on the shore of the Honey-Gold Ocean of Souls, I thought they were there for me. Particularly since Neel was Mr. Too-Cool-for-School-Princie-Pants and a bit slow with the thank-yous. I guess I figured he'd magically called ahead and set it all up for me. Which is a little embarrassing now that I actually think about it. Before we escaped my bio father Sesha's crumbling hotel-slash-casino-slash-underwater-detention-center, we were kind of busy. I mean, we were breaking Neel out of jail, fighting evil snakes, and stopping Sesha from killing me with two magical jewels turned neutron stars because he wanted to fulfill some prophecy, cheat death, and live forever. It's not like there was a ton of time for party planning. But I didn't think of all that until later.

"Oh my gosh! You shouldn't have!" I said in what I hoped was a surprised and yet humble voice as Neel, Naya, and I stumbled to our feet on the sandy beach. (The three of us having nonhuman parents was the only thing that made this swimming-up-from-the-bottom-of-the-ocean stuff remotely possible.)

“Oh dear!” squeaked Naya as she took in the scene. “We’re not properly dressed for a formal state engagement!”

That was a serious understatement. Neel, Naya, and I were all soaked to the skin. But they, being respectively a half rakkhosh and full-blooded rakkhoshi demon, hardly looked tired. On the other hand, despite being part serpent princess and part moon child, I was not only bent over and gasping for air, but had my hair all plastered to my face, seaweed hanging off my clothes, and what felt like a live school of fish in my left sock.

I pushed my hair from my face in what I hoped was an elegant gesture, and took in all the people who’d obviously been waiting for us. There were a bunch of girls in pink saris—all a part of the resistance group known as the Pink-Sari Skateboarders, or PSS, which was headed up by my adopted cousin-sister, Mati. Half of the PSS girls were human, and the other half-rakkhoshi demons—an idea I was only just getting used to. But there were others too—two or three old bearded men who looked like the Raja’s ministers, and a load of people who were a combination of nobles from the palace and royal servants. Everyone was dressed up and facing the water. Above their heads was a small gathering of bright blue butterflies, who seemed like they had been waiting for us too.



On one side of us, a singer with one hand on his ear and the other waving around in the air started warbling an up-and-down-the-scales classical tune while some musicians accompanied him—blowing on a shehnai, drumming on a tabla, and playing a stringed tanpura. Problem was, everybody seemed to be playing a slightly different song. To the side of the seated musicians were people carrying flower garlands and others with small lamps and incense holders.

“Aije, Princess Kiranmala!” yelled someone. It was one of the maids who had been assigned to take care of me when I was competing on the game show called *Who Wants to Be a Demon Slayer?* as the Kingdom Beyond’s champion. I’d been so popular, with my face on billboards and posters

and everything, that people had even taken to dressing like me. In fact, the maid waving wore an exact replica of my silver sparkly combat boots. I grinned drippily back at her, trying to give her a casual wave, like celebrities do when meeting fans.

“Thumbs-up on freeing Prince Neel! Shabash!” called another girl with a big green streak in her braid. She obviously hadn’t gotten the memo that my hair had gone back to its normal black. I wondered if I should ask the Kingdom Beyond’s teen fashion magazine, *Teen Taal*, to do an article on my hairstyle change.

“Too bad the game show turned out to be a big scam, and that the Serpent King wanted to kill you with the Chintamoni and Poroshmoni Stones so he could cheat death and live forever!” added a third girl, who was carrying, I noticed, a replica of my own bow and arrow. “We saw it all on the live broadcast! What a bummer!”

“Totally! Yeah! I mean, thanks!” I managed to call back. I guess you could classify my birth dad turning out to be an immortality-seeking homicidal maniac as a serious bummer. But I didn’t let the smile fall from my face. This huge crowd was here to see me, or so I thought, and I didn’t want to let them down. I wondered if I should offer to sign autographs or something.

That is, until I realized that no one was actually there to see me after all.

“Your Royal Majesty,” squeaked someone in a ridiculously high voice.

I turned around graciously, trying to channel every royal princess I’d ever seen on television, only to realize that the man with the high voice wasn’t talking to me at all. It was one of the bearded minister dudes, a tiny fellow with a purple turban on his head the shape of a state-fair-prizewinning turnip. And he was addressing Neel, holding out a little pillow to the prince. Wait a minute, none of this pomp was for me? I felt my face heat up like the sun.

Then I looked more carefully at the diamond-and-pearl-encrusted pillow in the minister’s hand. On it, weirdly enough, was a cheap paper crown—the kind a little kid might get in a fast-food restaurant with a side of fries and a shake.

Neel, who had been a little more jumpy than usual since his imprisonment, kind of scooted back at the minister’s offering. Like it was going to hurt him. “What’s with the crown, Sir Gobbet? Am I just imagining it or is it made of construction paper?”

“We did the best we could, Majesty,” said the little



minister named Gobbet. “We were in a rush, and a coronation isn’t a coronation without a crown.”

“Ooo! A coronation!” Naya clapped her hands like the goofy ray of sunshine she was.

“A coronation?” I mumbled, like the confused and disappointed girl from New Jersey I was.

“Coro-what-tion?” repeated Neel, looking both annoyed and confused.

“Your Majesty.” With some difficulty, because of her one shorter leg, my cousin Mati now knelt before Prince Neelkamal in the sand. She then pressed her hands together in a respectful namaskar. Neel jumped back even more. He may have been the Raja’s oldest son, while Mati was the

daughter of the palace stable master, my uncle, but I'd never seen Mati get down on the ground before Neel like this. Apparently, Neel hadn't either.

"Don't do that! Stop!" Poor Neel tried to help Mati to her feet, his face horrified. "Get up, Mati! It's not like that with us! We're friends!"

"Sooo dreamy!" drawled the rakkhoshi Priya as she came over to stand next to me. Like the other Pink-Sari Skateboarder demonesses, Priya had been down in Sesha's undersea hotel when it started to crumble, but had been sucked out into the ocean a little before us. Yet somehow, her camo pants, tank, and the pink sari she wore around her neck like a cape were already dry.

By the look on her face, I thought at first Priya was talking about Mati being dreamy, but then she went on in a fake-girly voice, "Prince Neelkamal's just so darned dedicated to equality, you know? That kind of attitude is, like, really attractive in an absolute monarch filthy with inherited wealth and unearned power."

The fire demoness breathed stinky smoke out of her nose as she shot the sarcastic words out of her mouth. I was still feeling stupid for thinking that all these people were here for me, but at least I wasn't soaking anymore.