**THANDA GOSHT**

Soon as Eesher Singh entered the room, Kalwant Kaur got up from the bed, stared at him with her sharp eyes and locked the door. It was past midnight and a strange and mysterious quietness seemed to have gripped the entire city.

Kalwant Kaur sat on the bed yoga-style and Eesher Singh, who was probably unravelling his thoughts, stood there with a dagger in his hand. A few moments passed in complete silence. Annoyed with the silence, Kalwant Kaur moved to the edge of the bed and started dangling her legs. Eesher Singh still didn’t say anything.

Kalwant Kaur was a well-built woman with wide hips, large and juggling upright breasts, sharp eyes and voluptuous greyish lips. The structure of her chin signified a strong woman.

His tight headgear loosened, Eesher Singh stood quietly in the corner. His hand that held the dagger was trembling. From his built one could tell that he was a perfect man for a woman like Kalwant Kaur.

Kalwant Kaur finally broke the silence, but the only words she could utter were “Eesher darling.” Eesher Singh looked at Kalwant Kaur but unable to bear the heat of her piercing eyes, looked the other way.

“Eesher darling,” Kalwant Kaur shrieked but immediately controlled her tone, “where were you all these days?”

“I don’t know.” Eesher Singh moved his tongue over his dry lips.

“What kind of answer is that?” asked Kalwant Kaur angrily.

Eesher Singh dropped his dagger on the floor and lied in bed. It seemed as if he had been ill for many days. Kalwant Kaur looked at the bed that was now filled with Eesher Singh and felt sorry for him.

“What’s the matter with you, darling?” Covering Eesher Singh’s forehead with her palm Kalwant Kaur asked lovingly.

Eesher Singh, who was staring at the ceiling, looked at Kalwant Kaur and gently stroked her familiar face. Kalwant.”

His voice had deep pain. Kalwant Kaur hugged him hard and, biting on his lips, said, “Yes darling?”

Eesher Singh took his headgear off, looked at Kalwant Kaur as if he were looking for support, spanked her wide hip, shook his head and mumbled to himself, “this girl is crazy.”

His long hair fell open when he shook his head. Kalwant Kaur ran her fingers through his hair and asked affectionately, “Eesher darling, where were you all these days?”

“Grandma’s house,” said Eesher Singh squeezing her breasts. “I swear to Waheguru, you are a real woman.”

Charmingly hitting his hand to move it away, Kalwant Kaur said, “You swear on me and tell me where you were. Went to town?”

“No,” said Eesher Singh folding his hair and making a knot.

“You went to town, looted a lot of money and now are not telling me.”

Kalwant Kaur was very annoyed with him.

“I’m not son of my father if I tell you a lie.”

Kalwant Kaur was quiet for a minute, then she suddenly started yelling, “But I don’t understand what happened to you that night. You were fine lying with me and had me wear all that jewellery you had looted the other day. You were kissing me all over then I don’t know what came over you that you suddenly got up, got dressed, and left.”

Eesher Singh turned pale. Kalwant Kaur immediately noticed it. “See! Eesher darling, I swear to Waheguru, I smell a rat.”

“I swear there’s nothing wrong.” There was no life in Eesher Singh’s voice.

Kalwant Kaur was now even more suspicious. Holding her lips tight and emphasizing each word, she said, “What’s the matter with you, Eesher darling? You are not the same person you were eight days ago.”

Eesher Singh got up quickly as if someone had assaulted him. He held Kalwant Kaur in his strong arms and ran his hands all over her body. “Darling, it’s the same old me. I’m gonna hug you so hard that heat will be coming out of your bones.”

Kalwant Kaur did not resist but kept complaining. “What happened to you that night?”

“Grandma’s fever!”

“You aren’t gonna tell me?”

“There’s nothing to tell.”

“Burn me with your hands if you lie.”

Eesher Singh put his arms around her neck and pressed his lips hard against hers. His moustache hair got into her nostrils, she sneezed, and both started laughing.

Eesher Singh took his jacket off, looked at Kalwant Kaur amorously, and said, “Let’s play cards.”

Kalwant Kaur’s lips moistened, she rolled her eyes charmingly and said, “Get lost!”

Eesher Singh pinched her buttock. Kalwant Kaur moved away painfully, “Don’t do that Eesher darling, it hurts.”

Eesher Singh sucked on her lips and bit on it. Kalwant Kaur melted like hot wax. He threw his shirt off. “So, let’s deal the cards.”

Kalwant Kaur’s lips quivered. Eesher Singh peeled her clothes off as skin off a goat. He stared her at naked body, pinched her arm, and said, “I swear to Waheguru, you’re some woman!”

Kalwant Kaur glanced at the red mark on her arm left by his pinch. “You’re so cruel, Eesher darling.”

Eesher Singh smiled underneath his thick black moustache, “Let the cruelty begin.”

He began his cruelty by kissing her lips and biting on her ear lobes. He squeezed her breasts, spanked her buttocks red, kissed her cheeks, and sucked her nipples wet. Kalwant Kaur started to boil like a hot pot on a blazing stove. But in spite of all that foreplay Eesher Singh could not get it up. Like a skilled wrestler, he used all the tricks in the book but none worked. Kalwant Kaur, who was brimming with sexual intensity, was getting irritated with his unnecessary moves.

“Eesher darling, that’s enough. Just throw the trump card.” She moaned.

As if Eesher Singh’s entire deck of cards fell hearing that. He loosened his grip and fell next to Kalwant Kaur panting. His forehead was sweating bullets.

Kalwant Kaur tried very hard to get it up for him but to no avail. Disappointed and infuriated, Kalwant Kaur got off the bed, picked the chador hanging on the nail on the wall and wrapped herself.

Her nostrils expanded, she said furiously, “Eesher darling, who’s that bitch you’ve spent all these days with who has sucked you dry.”

Eesher Singh kept lying in bed panting without saying a word. Kalwant Kaur was steaming. “I asked who’s that whore?”

“No one, Kalwant, no one.” Eesher Singh sounded very tired.

Kalwant Kaur put her hands on her wide hips and said with utter determination, “Eesher darling, I must know the truth, I swear to Waheguru. Is there another woman?”

Eesher Singh tried to say something but Kalwant Kaur cut him off. “Before you swear, you should know that I’m the daughter of Nihal Singh. I’ll cut you to pieces if you lied. Now, swear to Waheguru. Is there another woman?”

Eesher Singh shook his head sadly but affirmatively.

Kalwant Kaur went berserk. She picked up the dagger from the floor, removed its cover like a banana-peel, and stabbed Eesher Singh in the neck.  
Blood gushed forth from Eesher Singh’s neck. In a frenzy, Kalwant Kaur kept stabbing him and cursing the other woman.

“Let go, Kalwant, let go,” Eesher Singh said with his voice weakening. He had deep sadness in his voice. Kalwant Kaur pulled back.

Blood was jetting to Eesher Singh’s moustache. He looked at Kalwant Kaur with the mixed feeling of gratitude and protest. “My darling, you acted too quickly. But it’s for the better.”

Kalwant Kaur’s intense jealousy raised its head again, “Who’s she? Your mother?”

Blood was now reaching Eesher Singh’s mouth. He tasted it and his whole body shivered.

“And I…and I…killed six people with this same dagger.”

“I asked who’s that bitch?” There was no other thought on Kalwant Kaur’s mind.

Eesher Singh’s listless eyes sparkled for a brief moment, “Please don’t curse her.”

“Who’s that bitch?” yelled Kalwant Kaur.

“I’ll tell you.” Eesher Singh’s voice was breaking down. He touched his neck, felt the blood and smiled. “Man is so weird.”

“Get to the point.” Furious Kalwant Kaur was waiting for an answer.

Eesher Singh smiled again underneath his blood-filled moustache. “I’m getting to the point. You’ve slit my throat. I’ve to tell it very slowly.”

Cold sweat ran down his forehead as he began to recount. “Kalwant, my life, I cannot begin to tell you what happened to me. When the riot broke out in the city, like everyone else I also participated. I gave you the loot but did not tell you one thing.”

Eesher Singh groaned with pain. Kalwant Kaur had no feelings for him and paid no attention to his suffering. “What was it?”

Blowing on the blood-clot forming on his moustache, Eesher Singh said, “The house I attacked had seven people in it. I killed six of them, with the same dagger you stabbed me with. There was a beautiful girl in the house. I took her with me.”

Kalwant Kaur was listening intently. Eesher Singh once more tried to blow the blood off his moustache. “Kalwant darling, I cannot tell you what a beautiful girl she was. I would’ve killed her too. But I said to myself, no, Eesher Singh, you enjoy Kalwant Kaur every day. Taste a different fruit.”

“Oh” was the only word out of Kalwant Kaur’s mouth.

“I put her on my shoulder and got out. On the way…what was I saying…oh, yes…on the way, near the river, I lay her down by the bushes. First, I thought deal the cards. But then I decided not to…” Eesher Singh throat was completely dry.

“Then what happened?” gulped Kalwant Kaur.

“I threw the trump card…but…but…,” Eesher Singh’s voice was now a mere whisper.

“Then what happened?” Kalwant Kaur shook him.

Eesher Singh opened his tired and sleepy eyes and looked at Kalwant Kaur whose whole body was trembling.

“She was dead, Kalwant, it was a dead body…a cold flesh…please hold my hand.”

Kalwant Kaur put her hand over his. His hand was colder than ice.