
Here to
Slay

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Here to Slay

Radhika Sanghani

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To all the teens who slay



Chapter 1

I can't believe this is happening. But it is.

The entire class is staring at me, and Mrs Patel is forcing them to sing 'Happy Birthday.' I can't look up. It's too much. So I just stare at my scratched wooden desk, my cheeks burning up, even though my dark brown skin means I'm the only one who knows it. They're getting to the 'dear Kali' bit, and my stomach is churning with dread.

I keep my eyes firmly down, wishing I was anywhere but here. I can still see everyone smirking in my peripheral vision. Hayley and Rihanna rolling their eyes at each other as they sing obediently, fully aware of just how cringe this is. Joe King (his actual name) singing loudly and deeply, his voice as sexy as always. And then he practically booms 'dear Kaaaa-liiiiiii' and I don't know whether to be thrilled that my crush of five years knows my name, or totally mortified he's being forced to sing it out loud in our RE class.

Finally, the nightmare ends, and everyone claps politely. I shoot Mrs Patel a look that sums up exactly how I feel, but only when she's turning the other way. I'm not *that* brave. But I am still annoyed.

Just because Mrs Patel and I are the only Indians in the whole of South Bridge Secondary, she thinks that makes us friends or allies or whatever. It doesn't. I don't need her drawing more attention to the fact I'm different to everybody else with my skin, irritatingly thick black hair, and the curries my mum gives me for my packed lunch. All I want is to fit in. That's my 16th birthday wish. To get through the rest of the day – and ideally the rest of the year – without anybody noticing me. It hasn't gone well so far, but now the singing's out of the way; things should be back on track.

'In honour of Kali's birthday, I've decided to theme today's lesson around the Hindu goddess that she's named after,' beams Mrs Patel. I stare at her in horror. This is *not* what I meant about getting through the day without being noticed. 'According to Hindu mythology, Kali is the goddess of death, destruction and doomsday. The three Ds!'

That's it. I give up. If it wasn't bad enough that I'm named after the scariest, ugliest Indian goddess in

existence, Mrs Patel just felt the need to divulge it to the entirety of Year 11. There is no way Joe King will *ever* ask me to the Summer Dance now.

'Doomsday!' It's Joe himself. He's cracking up with laughter, and if it wasn't about me, I would've been as well. 'Kali's named after the *doomsday* goddess?'

'Awkward,' says Hayley, glancing over at me. It's not often I agree with Hayley – though obviously I would never tell her that; I'm not ready to commit social suicide – but right now, she's got a point.

'Calm down everyone,' says Mrs Patel, clapping her hands for attention. 'You'll understand more when I explain the creation story of Kali.' She gives me a pointed look, before clearing her throat dramatically. 'It begins with the ancient Hindu gods. They were battling a demon called Raktabija, which translates to Blood-Seed. He was incredibly powerful, and if a drop of his blood touched the ground a clone of his would instantly appear.'

I stare at her in surprise. I had no idea that this story even existed – or what it has to do with the goddess I'm named after.

'Every time he or a clone was slain, there were new clones to deal with,' she continues. 'It meant the gods

were close to losing their battle against him and his army of clones, so they decided to work together. They combined all their divine energy to produce one super-being who could destroy the demon once and for all: the goddess Kali.'

I gasp aloud. I'm obviously not a fan of the goddess I'm named after – the three Ds? Seriously? – but it is cool she's a super-being with the ability to destroy demons.

'Whoah!' Joe's eyes are wide. 'Did Doomsday kill them all?'

'She did,' affirms Mrs Patel. 'She swallowed Raktabija's army whole, so none of their blood touched the ground, and then she defeated him by cutting off his head and drinking up his blood to ensure no more demons would enter the world!'

That is *not* where I was hoping this story would go.

'Ew!' cries Hayley. 'She drank his blood?! That's seriously gross.' She faux-gags while Rihanna laughs in agreement.

I slump down into my seat in resignation. Any remaining hope I had of getting through the day without more humiliation has officially disappeared. The most popular girls in the whole year know I'm named after a blood-sucking goddess.

How could things get any worse?

'I've printed out a photograph of Kali so you can all look at it for context,' announces Mrs Patel, who is fast becoming my new nemesis. 'Jack, hand them out.'

This was definitely worse.

Jack – Joe's best friend – howls with laughter as he looks at the image, before trying to control his mirth as Mrs Patel glares at him. I know what's coming, and I force myself to breathe deeply before I look at the sheet that Jack hands me with me a smirk. It's worse than I remembered. Kali, in full A4 size, with her charcoal-black skin, bulging three white eyes (she has an extra one on her forehead) and enormous red tongue. The tongue that she uses to lick up demon blood.

'Kali is not cute,' declares Rihanna. Then she looks at me and her hand flies to her mouth. 'The goddess, I mean! Not… uh... I don't…'

'I can't believe you're named after a demon hunter,' says Joe, looking right at me. Oh my god. He's talking to me. On purpose. 'That is seriously crazy, Doomsday.'

I gape, speechless. The boy I've had a crush on since Year 7 has just given me a nickname. And it's Doomsday. Is this as bad as it sounds, or… is it progress?!

I wish I had a best friend to over-analyse this with,

but ever since Tanya left to go to Greece last year, it's just been me. So, I do what I always do, and turn away with an embarrassed smile, hiding behind my curtain of thick, dark hair.

'So, are you ready for the archery competition on Saturday?' Rihanna asks Joe.

'Yeah, I've been practising,' said Joe. My ears prick up. I didn't know Joe was going to be in the archery competition. I didn't even know there was one. That's how involved I am in school extracurriculars.

Hayley winds her hair round her fingers as she smiles at Joe. They used to go out. But they broke up last year. Hayley always said it was her choice and, judging by the way she's fluttering her lashes at him, she's changed her mind. 'I bet you'll be amazing!'

'Well, I've been practising too,' said Rihanna, shaking her braids confidently. 'So the competition is officially on!'

'Can't wait!' squeals Hayley. 'I've already chosen my outfit.'

I roll my eyes and turn back to the front as Mrs Patel calls out for attention. 'Right, I'd like you all to write an essay on Kali for homework please. 500 words on who she is and what she represents.' Just then, the bell rings and everyone starts rushing out of the door,

chatting together, bags clashing. I move to follow them, but Mrs Patel stops me. 'Happy birthday again, Kali. I just wanted to say… good luck. With everything. You'll be okay.'

I blink at her in confusion. 'Good luck with… my essay?'

'Yes exactly!' she says, her face clearing. 'I think you'll find you may have more in common with the goddess Kali than you think.'

I can't think what she's referring to other than the fact that we both apparently now go by Doomsday – oh, and that Rihanna thinks neither of us are cute.