



Learn English Through Stories.

J Series

J8

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu.**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>

Contents

Keepers of the Kalachakra.

Part 8: 31 to 35.

Keepers of the Kalachakra

By Ashwin Sanghi

Part 8

Thirty -one

Around twenty-five people were inside the darkened room. Its walls were cushioned in purple velvet. The smell of frankincense was pervasive on account of the incense-burners located on the imposing stone altar that stood at the head of the room. Above the altar stood a massive statue fashioned in solid gold. It was that of an owl.

Other than those who were present, no one else even knew of the existence of this place. It was accessed via a nondescript entrance located in Altstadt. Each of the members had their own keys that enabled them to access the long, dimly lit passage that led to the meeting chamber.

The Worshipful Master, dressed in a dark brown robe along with a monk's hood that covered his face, spoke. 'Brothers and sisters of Minerva, heed my words.'

'O Minerva, make us heed,' chanted the others.

Each of them was dressed in a robe and hood identical to the one worn by the Worshipful Master. The only difference was that the Worshipful Master also wore a heavy golden chain around his neck from which was suspended a large ruby.

'We are descended from the oldest order of Europe. An order that came into being in 1776. An order that has defiantly stood for truth and reason.'

'May Minerva always stay true,' intoned the others.

'The Order of the Perfectibilists paved the way for so many of us. Brothers and sisters, this order was our progenitor. And it was from the Perfectibilists that we received our symbol, the sacred owl of Minerva.'

'May Minerva's owl grant us wisdom,' droned the group.

‘It was our parents, the Perfectibilists, who spawned us siblings—the Illuminati and Minerva,’ said the Worshipful Master. ‘The fundamental duty of the Illuminati was to fight against the religious dogma of the Catholic Church.’

‘May Minerva banish dogma,’ chanted the others.

‘But we are neither Perfectibilists nor Illuminati. We are Minerva. The children of the Perfectibilists and the brothers of the Illuminati. Our duties and responsibilities should never be forgotten.’

‘May Minerva keep us dutiful,’ said the group.

‘The threat in today’s world is no longer the dogma of the Catholic Church. That threat was neutralized by our Illuminati brethren many years ago. No, the greatest threat is from the radicalized followers of Mohammed! It is the threat of Islamist terror that must concern us!’

‘May Minerva extinguish the threat,’ recited the group.

‘Here is Minerva’s divine revelation for you, oh brothers and sisters. Jerusalem and Constantinople will crumble. Rome will die. Mecca will decay. Only the truth will survive. This is your sole responsibility. To rid the world of the havoc wreaked by Islamism and its terror factories.’

‘May Minerva make it so,’ chanted the group.

‘Elevate and proclaim the light, brothers and sisters. Nations, laws, monarchs and governors are mere dust before Minerva. Rise and fight!’

‘Oh Minerva, make it so,’ half-sang the assembly obediently.

Thirty - two

The film was a typical Bollywood love-triangle. And it was precisely the reason why Vijay avoided going to the movies. Neither he nor Sujatha had the patience for endless schmaltz and predictable outcomes, and they left the cinema hall half-way through the film.

They walked over to a coffee place nearby and sat down. After they had placed their orders, Sujatha reached out to grasp his hand and looked into his eyes.

‘What’s troubling you, Vee?’ she asked, using a nickname that no one else did. ‘You’ve been lost this entire evening.’

Nothing escapes her, thought Vijay.

Vijay never really had time for friends or romance, given the demands of his research. Sujatha was his only friend, someone who had grown up along with him and a hundred other kids at the orphanage. Vijay and Sujatha had been the brightest among their peers, the ones who had successfully navigated the choppy waters of life without parents.

Sujatha’s job at the BSI meant that she was always travelling. And that suited Vijay perfectly. He was quite happy in his solitude. But that seemed to be drawing to a close. How do I tell her that the job offer and the possibility of marriage are spooking the hell out of me? he wondered.

‘I’m not sure that I want to take the offer made by Milesian Labs,’ he said, adding several cubes of sugar to his coffee. He needed extra energy for this conversation.

‘Why not?’ asked Sujatha. ‘Isn’t it a proposal beyond your wildest dreams?’ Vijay hung onto the word ‘proposal’. Why is everything about proposals?

‘Something just doesn’t feel right,’ said Vijay. ‘The chap who interviewed me, Schmidt, is bordering on the psychotic.’

Sujatha smiled at that, her cheeks dimpling as she did so. Vijay sometimes thought he was absolutely crazy not to immediately marry her. Sujatha was no classical beauty, but she was undeniably pretty in her own way. She was petite and kept her wavy hair at shoulder-length. She was usually attired in subdued and neatly tailored clothes that never detracted from her innate femininity. Like Vijay, Sujatha was devoted to her work but she seemed to manage her work–life balance far better than he did.

‘Most bosses are psychotic,’ said Sujatha, as if that was a comfort. ‘I remember my last boss. She wanted me to swim along the perimeter of a lake to collect specimens of algae. And you know how much water terrifies me. But this woman would simply not take no for an answer.’

‘What happened?’ asked Vijay.

‘Eventually she got one of the others to go in, but she never stopped giving me grief about it,’ replied Sujatha. ‘She made my life hell, but I stuck on.’

She paused. 'Think about it, Vee, this could be your ticket to financial freedom,' she said gently.

And marriage.

Thirty - three

'Overall, you are trailing your competition by almost eight points,' said his campaign manager. 'If the elections were sooner, I would be very worried. Luckily we have a few months. Hopefully you'll peak at just the right time.'

They were in a hotel suite and the candidate was in a bad mood after seeing the poll results. 'The upcoming debates are all-important,' said his manager reassuringly. 'If you handle those well, it should be fairly easy to narrow the gap.'

'I will,' replied the Presidential-hopeful, pulling on a casual sweater over his checked shirt and jeans, his only concession to Sunday. 'The hard truth is that there isn't one America. There are many. And some of them are Americas that the press never speaks about— unemployed America, disillusioned America and xenophobic America. An America that is angry with immigrants taking American jobs and imams blaring radical ideology from the tops of mosques. All I need to do is to tap into that groundswell of dissatisfaction.'

His manager walked over to the whiteboard that had been placed in a corner of the suite. 'Over the next couple of months you will be part of several debates, interviews, press conferences and events. Voters are interested in seeing how you handle the heat. You need to fully prepare for harsh and uncomfortable questions.'

'Really?' asked the candidate sarcastically. 'May I ask how?'

'Simple really,' answered his manager, unperturbed. 'It's called the three-step technique or the bucket method.' He began writing the steps on the whiteboard as he spoke.

'One: understand the question and dump it into an overall category—a bucket. For example, a question may be related to terrorism, healthcare, immigration, economy, taxation, defence, environment or any other broad subject.'

'Then what?' asked the candidate.

‘Two: for every potential bucket, there is an answer that you would have already memorized by then, prepared to perfection. You will immediately launch into that.’

‘And step three?’

‘Ensure that you include words and phrases from the question,’ replied his manager. ‘It will make the answer seem less mechanical and more spontaneous. Remember that leaders who sound good off-the-cuff actually toil days in advance.’

There was a knock on the door and three more campaign staffers walked in. They all looked tired. The American Presidential race was one of the longest among most countries: more marathon, less sprint.

‘Just thought that I would update you regarding this week’s rallies,’ said a woman staffer, holding a clipboard.

‘Shoot,’ said the candidate.

‘The schedule is tightly packed with two major events every day,’ she replied. ‘We will ramp that up to three, and then four a day as we come closer to election day.’

‘Tell me the schedule for this week.’

‘Well, on Monday you will do St Augustine and Tampa in Florida; on Tuesday you continue in Florida with Sanford and Tallahassee; Wednesday is for Cleveland and Springfield in Ohio; Thursday’s fixtures are Toledo and Geneva in Ohio; Friday is for Grand Rapids, followed by Warren in Michigan.’

‘What about the weekend?’ he asked. ‘You usually have travel plans,’ she said. ‘All that can wait,’ he said.

‘In that case we’ll plan Saturday in Pennsylvania at Moon Township, followed by Scranton. Sunday in Minneapolis, Minnesota.’

‘Only one event on Sunday?’ he asked. ‘You may need a break,’ she replied.

‘No breaks,’ he said. ‘I plan on winning this thing.’

Thirty - four

Syohodni was the loudest and grittiest rave circuit in Eastern Europe and was known for its stark locations and underground spirit. Syohodni was the go-to place if you were a youngster in Kiev.

Petrov headed to the abandoned hangar, the location of the next Syohodni rave, along with his aide from the SVR. The hangar had been part of an airfield built by the Soviets while Ukraine had still been part of the Union. 'What's the idea of getting there at three in the morning?' asked Petrov, as he took another drag from his umpteenth cigarette.

His aide, who was driving the car, replied without taking his eyes off the road. 'This place only comes alive in the early hours of the morning. It's the hottest after-party location among the young and hip.'

'And the stoned?'

'Yes,' replied the aide. 'Ecstasy, Speed, Special K, Ice and Lucy. All available for the right price. The owner looks the other way.'

Petrov did a quick translation in his head. It was easy. Currency for information in his line of work was often drugs. Ecstasy meant MDMA—or methylenedioxymethamphetamine, but nobody knew or cared to know the mouthful; Speed was the 'cool' way of saying amphetamines; Special K stood for ketamine; Ice meant methamphetamine; and Lucy was even shorter for LSD—or lysergic acid diethylamide to the seriously uncool.

'How do people get to know where a rave is being hosted?' asked Petrov.

'They use Facebook and WhatsApp to circulate the invitations. Locations vary. Syohodni uses abandoned workshops in the dockyards, airport hangars, railway sheds, empty office blocks and closed factories as venues. Always away from the centre of Kiev. That averts unwelcome attention from the law enforcement guys.'

'How do you know that our man is there?' asked Petrov. The man in question was a former agent of Kitchener Consulting, one of the largest private investigation firms in the world. He was their best bet.

'Been tracking his phone,' came the answer. They had kept the man under surveillance for several days.

They crossed Kiev's monotonous highrises and several incomplete bridges on the river Dneiper. Thirty minutes later they reached the venue.

Thirty - five

It was the perfect location for a rave, off the police radar and sufficiently distant from Kiev. They parked the car by a derelict railway line on the fringe of the discarded airstrip and walked along the potholed runway towards the thumping music that was emerging from the hangar.

'No gun?' asked Petrov.

'They pat down visitors,' said the aide. 'In any case, my hands are sufficient.'

They reached the dilapidated hangar a few minutes later. The vibrations of the loud music playing inside could be felt before entering. A bouncer at the gate looked at Petrov and his aide suspiciously as he took the entry fee from them in cash and patted them down. It was obvious to the expert that they did not belong there. Their entry had significantly increased the average age, for one.

Inside the massive hangar, hundreds of teenagers gyrated to loud electronic music. The air was thick with sweet-smelling smoke. Weed was the mildest drug on offer that night.

They made their way to the bar, a long table that stretched along the length of one side of the hall. Everything seemed available: every variety of hard liquor and recreational drug. Suddenly Petrov's aide nudged his arm. 'Your three o'clock,' he said into Petrov's ear. It was the Kitchener man.

They quickly made their way over to him. He seemed as though he was already tripping; his eyes had a glazed look. He felt a hand close in on his privates. Petrov's aide was squeezing the man's balls in a vice-like grip. 'If I want I can crush them this very instant,' he warned. 'Now be a good boy and come outside with us.'