Munh Band (Keep your mouth shut)

written by

Nainika Kapoor

TRIGGER WARNING: RAPE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

9174979656
nk2578@nyu.edu

INT. BEDROOM- EARLY MORNING

RUHI, 24, lies on her bed with her eyes open. She looks to her side and her husband MOHIT, 29, is still asleep. There's a bottle of Old Monk whiskey on his bedside and some of it seems to be spilt down the front of his *kurta (*Indian long shirt). She stares at him with a hint of disgust but a whole lot of indifference.

She gets up and swings her legs over the side of the bed. She's rather vertically challenged, so much so that her feet don't touch the ground, they just remain suspended in the air. She gets up and puts a shawl around her equally horizontally challenged frame.

Next to her bed is a room divider which she steps behind. The expanse of the room or lack of becomes apparent. Encased within four grey murky walls are Ruhi's bed, a few cupboards, a stove set up with dishes hanging off the walls, and just next to Ruhi's feet a mattress, where her two children lay, deep in their sleep. ANCHAL, 6, and ADVIK, 7.

She kneels down on the floor and starts ruffling the tops of their heads. When there's no response she shifts to the end of the mattress and starts tickling the bottoms of both their feet. Four eyes open with confusion and then sink into the familiarity of the routine. Eventually two tired smiles erupt into a bout of giggles.

RUHI
Someone tell me what I did to get these two lazy, useless children sent to me?

ADVIK
Mama just 5 minutes more?

RUHI
Hmm, five won't do. But I'm willing to bargain. Does anyone have a better offer for me?

ANCHAL
2 minutes?

RUHI
Well, I could settle for two but no promises from the tickle monster!!

Ruhi starts tickling them causing an eruption of loud laughter this time.

RUHI (CONT'D)
The tickle monster won't give up till he sees these feet firmly on the ground. GRRR-

She's interrupted by a sudden groan that turns into a growl.

MOHIT
AGHHH, just get the hell up and let me sleep.

The laughter turns cold . The kids launch themselves up and go off to get ready. Ruhi takes a second on the bed to glance in the direction of the bed before getting up herself

RUHI
(whispering)
Alright who's going to get dressed the fastest?

ANCHAL
(whispering back)
Me!

EXT. A BLOCK OF APARTMENTS- MORNING

An averagely nice block of apartments are starting to wake up. The paper boy rides in through the gate. He pulls up to one of the buildings and dismounts his cycle, taking one of the bundles that hangs off his seat.

INT.HALLWAY- CONTINOUS

The PAPERBOY enters the building and slides the paper under the first door on the left. Above it reads a sign," NO PAPERS UNDER THE DOOR!"

The boy is still leaned over by the door when it rips open and behind it are two polished till they're sparkling, black uniform shoes. As the boy tilts his head up a police uniform is revealed and attached to it is JAYATA, 30.

The boy's face freezes.

JAYATA
Got you!

EXT. JAYATA'S BLOCK OF APARTMENTS- DAY

Ruhi is somewhere between walking and running, she's late! As she enters the same gate the paper boy did, she passes a bunch of maids all huddled on one small patch of green grass, as their respective owner's dogs take shits. They all follow her with their heads.

MAID 1
Late again, Ruhi?

RUHI
(continuing to walk)
Kids. School. I'll talk to you guys later.

They all fake smile at her as she runs off.

MAID 2
You know, I heard her husbands an alcoholic now, Asif told me was laid off.

MAID 3
Well if she continues to come this late I give it a week before she's fired too.

MAID 4
Yeah right! Have you seen the way her madam treats her? Like bloody royalty if you ask me. New saris every Diwali, I've heard she gets payed on her days off, and guess what? Madam even told me that they eat together.

MAID 2
What? Like on the same table?

MAID 4
That's what I've heard.

MAID 3
Well that's what happens when you work for someone single and alone.

MAID 2
Are you sure? I've never heard of a madam and her maid eating together. Weird if you ask me.

MAID 1
Who gives a shit, weird or not, I would have sleepovers and braid my madam's hair if it meant getting paid on my off days.

One of the dogs poops. They all look at the turd.

INT.HALLWAY- DAY

Ruhi enters the building and she can hear shouting as soon as she does. She rolls her eyes.

PAPERBOY
How many times have I told you I can't read English?

JAYATA
Well do you have memory loss as well? How many times have I told you, don't put my paper under the door. It gets jammed and then I end up tearing it when I open the door.

PAPERBOY
Arrey Auntie, how important is the news to you anyway. You're a cop, I'm sure you have your own insider information coming through on that.

He leans forward and taps the walkie talkie hanging off her belt. Jayata smirks and pulls it out of her belt, she smiles at Ruhi who's now standing at the door.

JAYATA
Oh yeah? Have it your way then.

She speaks into the walkie talkie.

JAYATA (CONT'D)
I have an incredibly small sized human here trying to act cheeky, copy?

Ruhi shakes her head and laughs. She takes the bundle of papers that now rest on the ground, puts it in Paperboy's hands and playfully pushes him down the hall.

RUHI
Aren't there other people who need papers or do you come here for the sole purpose of fighting everyday?

PAPERBOY
It's her, not me!

JAYATA
Yeah yeah keep it moving, I'll get you tomorrow.

Jayata smiles as she turns back into the house and Ruhi follows.

INT- LIVING ROOM- CONTINUED

The space is moderately sized and the furniture isn't anything too exciting but its sufficient. Ruhi places two brown paper bags onto the dining table. She ties the ends of her sari around her waist- this always means it's work time.

JAYATA (CONT'D)
What did you get?

RUHI
I couldn't find sweet potatoes so I just got normal ones instead.

JAYATA
How much?

RUHI
30 rupees

JAYATA
Okay well you know where to find the money.

RUHI
Yes, ma'am! What should I make for dinner?

JAYATA
Whatever's easy. Are you going to stay for dinner today?

RUHI
No the kids will be back early

Jayata exits off to her room and comes back with her police hat. She places it on top of her head.

JAYATA
Right, that's fine. I made *anda bhurji,* it's in the kitchen if you want some.

RUHI
Arrey didi, I told you, I'm supposed to cook breakfast for you!

JAYATA
Well if I waited till you decided to show up, I'd die of hunger.

She smirks but there's no anger behind the statement.

RUHI
Sorry didi, I had to drop the kids to school again. Mohit doesn't wake up for work anymore so he doesn't drop the kids.

JAYATA
Still no job?

RUHI
No, but he's trying his best.

JAYATA
I'll ask around. It's getting close to Diwali, I'm sure a lot of people's drivers are going to go on leave. I'll put in a good word.

Ruhi nods and smiles a smile of appreciation. She picks up the potatoes and heads to the kitchen.

RUHI
You're going to be late.

JAYATA
Indeed I am! I'm sure getting into office today is going to be difficult again today.

RUHI
Protests haven't died down?

JAYATA
Nope. I don't know what they think protesting will achieve in this country.

RUHI
You never know.

JAYATA
Trust me. I know.

INT. CAR- DAY

Jayata is stuck in a traffic jam. She honks and honks but none of the traffic is moving.

She gets frustrated and gets out of the car where a bunch of other people have gotten out of their cars.

She goes up to the person who's gotten out of his car in front of her- CAR MAN.

JAYATA
What's going on?

CAR MAN
Madam they've blocked off the road.

JAYATA
Who?

Jayata now looks ahead of the line of cars. There are about 200 women. They're standing in the middle of the road with various signs and al holding candles.

"SHE MAY HAVE BEEN SILENCED BUT WE WON'T BE"

"JUSTICE FOR NIMRAN"

"I'D RATHER BE IN HELL THAN A WOMAN IN INDIA"

There are cardboard cut outs of two men that they set fire to.

CAR MAN
When will they learn.

JAYATA
Men never learn.

CAR MAN
No, the women.

Jayata stays silent but looks on at the protest.

Suddenly a group of cop cars pull up. They approach the protesters with aggression as they all hold *Lathis (*wooden canes). They start swatting the protesters out of the road.

Jayata almost sighs with relief and gets back in the car.

INT. POLICE STATION- DAY

POLICE STATION,SUSHANT LOK,GURGAON. A handful of cops stagger around the main hall with cups of chai in their hands. The phones ringing but no ones picking it up and right in the centre of the back wall is a 10x10 framed photo of Mahatma Gandhi.

Jayata walks into the saloon style doors and the cop at the entrance salutes her. She pays him no mind. A small round constable, officially named MURLI approaches her as she enters her office. But no one called him Murli they all called him *Ghanti- (doorbell).*

GHANTI
Madam, Mr.Chawla is waiting, he wanted to know if you'd see him now.

Jayata walks around to the back of her desk on which there is a plaque, DEPUTY INSPECTOR GENERAL- JAYATA DEWAN

JAYATA
That man shows up every year like clockwork. If he can remember to show up here, you'd think he would remember to pay his taxes once in a while.

Ghanti laughs and then waits

GHANTI
So should I send him in or?

JAYATA
What are you waiting for? Should I write it on my forehead? Send him in!

INT. JAYATA'S OFFICE- DAY

BAlRAM CHAWLA a middle aged man with a paunch spilling over his belt sits across the table from Jayata. He's wearing sunglasses and a neon pink turban sits on his head.

JAYATA
Haanji, Chawla Sahab, what can I do for you this year?

BALRAM
Madam-

JAYATA
Inspector Dewan.

BALRAM
Inspector Dewan. I feel like we know each other so well now, we can skip the small talk. I'm a busy man and I'm sure you're a busy woman.

JAYATA
You know if someone is doing a favour it's usually a good idea not to rush them.

Balram looks pissed off but nods all the same as if to say continue.

JAYATA (CONT'D)
5 years? If I'm not wrong that's how many years you haven't payed your taxes in. Is that correct Mr. Chawla

BALRAM
Correct, Inspector.

JAYATA
That means this year you must have gotten a particularly nasty letter from the income tax department.

BALRAM
I did yes.

Jayata raises her eyebrows at his expectedly. Balram rolls his eyes and takes an envelope out from inside his suit jacket. He slides it over and Jayata opens it.

JAYATA
Blah Blah blah, Aha! Failure to comply or proof of valid exemption can result in a fine of upto 20 Lakh Rupees and a jail sentence decided at the given court date.

BALRAM
Yes, I know the problem. Can you help me?

JAYATA
Mr. Chawla you are illegally withholding crores and crores of money that are meant for the Indian public, does this seem like a joke to you? You belong behind bars and I'm afraid there's nothing I can do for you. There is no exemption that I can arrange for a criminal like yourself.

Jayata slides the letter back over the table.

JAYATA (CONT'D)
Ghanti! Please come and escort Chawla *Sahab* out of my office.

Ghanti comes running into the office.

GHANTI
Sir, please.

He gestures towards the door

BALRAM
Cut the crap.

JAYATA
Excuse me?

BALRAM
Cut the crap. If you want to talk numbers, I'm ready to. I don't appreciate the unnecessary dramatics

JAYATA
Ghanti, do you think I'm ever over dramatic?

GHANTI
No, Ma'am.

JAYATA
See?

BALRAM
A price?

JAYATA
20 Lakh Rupees..

Balram and Ghanti's eyes both widen

JAYATA (CONT'D)
is what I'd be saving you.

Sigh of relief from Balram.

JAYATA (CONT'D)
And you've been coming to me for how many years again?

BALRAM
Five.

JAYATA
Five, right. So if I do just a bit of gentle math here and there. I'd say 4 lakhs.

Balram laughs

BALRAM
Have you gone insane? I'll give you one lakh. Max.

JAYATA
But where's the math in that Balram? See it's actually quite a simple formula. I take how much they're gonna rip you a new asshole for. Right? So, 20. Then I divide that by how many times I've saved your ass and that's 5, we already established that. 4 lakhs Mr. Chawla. I would consider that a discount since I didn't even take jail time into consideration

Balram isn't laughing anymore.

BALRAM
3 Lakhs.

JAYATA
Ghanti do I ever negotiate?

GHANTI
No, ma'am

Balram looks like a kettle about to go off

BALRAM
3.5 lakhs final, you.. you selfish bitch.

JAYATA
Mr. Chawla you know I'm your best and last chance. 4 lakhs and watch your mouth. I don't doubt I'll be seeing you here for a sixth year and I'm sure you'd like me to continue to show you kindness. Besides are't elections coming up soon? No one wants a fraud in power, Balram .

Mr. Chawla blinks a few times, he knows he's been defeated. He picks up his phone

BALRAM
Bring my check book from the car.

Jayata goes and sits back on her chair. Ghanti is looking at her as if she just eliminated world hunger.

JAYATA
Ghanti, get Mr, Chawla some chai please.

INT. RUHI'S ROOM- NIGHT

Ruhi is patting the backs of her children as they fall asleep. She peaks at their eyes to make sure they're both asleep. She smiles and then yawns.

The door bursts open and Mohit stands in the doorway

RUHI
(hushed but stern)
What are you doing? You'll wake the kids!

Mohit staggers into the room and goes straight towards the bottle and glass next to his bed. Ruhi doesn't get up from the kids bed.

MOHIT
I'm hungry.

Ruhi sighs she looks as if she's about to argue but she gets up and goes to the kitchen. She turns the gas on.

RUHI
Did you go talk to Asif about that job, Mohit?

MOHIT
Are you fucking capable of asking me anything other than that?

RUHI
Keep your voice down, I just got the kids to bed

MOHIT
I don't care let them wake up.

RUHI
Of course you don't

MOHIT
What did you say?

RUHI
Nothing.

Mohit struggles to get up but does so, he goes up to Ruhi and puts his head on her shoulder in order to keep himself up.

MOHIT
(whispering)
You think only you care about the kids? You think you rule this house now just because you're making the money?

Mohit puts the glass down on the counter and grabs onto Ruhi's waits, a little too tight.

MOHIT (CONT'D)
This is my house. This is still *my* fucking house.

Ruhi is frozen in her spot, she says nothing.

MOHIT (CONT'D)
Right?

He grabs onto her braid and yanks it back,

MOHIT (CONT'D)
(screaming now)
Tell me this is my house.

RUHI
This is your house, this is your house. Please don't scream.

MOHIT
(contuines to scream but louder)
Don't tell me what to do, Ruhi. You know I don't like it when you tell me what to fucking do.

The kids stir in their beds. In a state of panic Ruhi turns around and covers his mouth. As soon as she does she knows she's made a mistake. Mohit's eyes bulge with Ruhi's hands still on his mouth. He punches her right in the gut and she doubles over into the ground.

She clutches her stomach and has tears welling up in her eyes but she glances over at the kids, they're still asleep. She looks up at Mohit.

RUHI
You're still my husband, this is still your house. I'm sorry

Mohit breaths a sigh of relief. He picks her up off the ground and is holding her by her arms.

MOHIT
Come to bed

RUHI
I'm making your food.

MOHIT
Come to bed. Now.

RUHI
Mohit I'm tired, I'm going to make your food and go to sleep.

MOHIT
You're my wife?

RUHI
I'm your wife

MOHIT
I'm still the leader of this house?

RUHI
You're the leader of this house, Mohit.

MOHIT
Then show me, come to bed right now.

RUHI
I told you, I'm tired

Mohit leans in for a kiss. She pecks him and then goes to pull away. He holds her right there an inch away from his face

MOHIT
So now you don't want to sleep with me?

RUHI
I don't want to sleep with you right now

MOHIT
I lose my job and you don't want to sleep with me

RUHI
It's not about that Mohit, I just don't want to today.

Mohit's face fills with rage again and he slaps her. He drags her by the hair behind the room divider. Ruhi looks at her kids as she's being dragged and puts her own hands over her mouth.

There's no volume, no visuals, the screen is black.

Flashes of Advik and Anchal waking up.

Advik covers Anchal's ears.

They look at the screen divider in fear, they see nothing but they must be able to hear something.

No volume- mute silence.

In more flashes, Mohit leaves the house in a hurry.

INT. RUHI'S ROOM- MORNING

Ruhi lies on her bed sobbing, but she makes no noise. Mohit isn't anywhere to be seen.

ADVIK
Mama?

Advik peaks from behind the divider as if he's scared to see something he doesn't want to. Ruhi sits up on the spot and wipes her tears.

RUHI
Advik *beta*, why are you awake?
What's wrong?

ADVIK
Anchal and I heard you crying in
the middle of the night.

The blood drains out of Ruhi's face, she stares at him for a long time. Even her tears pause. She finally snaps out of whatever thought she's in.

RUHI
Wake Anchal up. We're leaving.

INT. JAYATA'S OFFICE- DAY

Jayata sits at her desk doing her accounts. She's counting small stacks of money and making note. The sound of protesters is fairly loud in the background and she keeps on messing up.

JAYATA
For God's sake, what do they think
they're going to achieve protesting
outside a bloody police office?
We're not the supreme court.

Ghanti thinks for a second.

GHANTI
I'm a phenomenal singer ma'am I can
sing to drown out the noise if you
like.

He opens his mouth to start singing. Jayata eyes him with daggers and he closes his mouth.

She goes back to counting and puts her hand out for another stack, Ghanti hands her a new one.

GHANTI (CONT'D)
I think you've out done yourself
this month, Ma'am.

A loud voice can be heard outside snapping both Ghanti and Ruhi into attention. Ruhi grabs all the money and shoves it into a drawer in her desk. Ghanti looks frozen with the money in his hand.

JAYATA
(hushed)
Ghanti, drop the money. Now.

He snaps out of it and unloads the stack and slams the drawer shut just in time for when INSPECTOR GENERAL KALRA comes through the door.

They both stand up and salute.

GHANTI
Morning sir.

KALRA
Murli.

JAYATA
Sir.

KALRA
Dewan.

JAYATA
Please sit.

KALRA
No need. Just came to check in. How's it going Dewan? I hear you're running a tight ship around here.

JAYATA
Yes sir.

KALRA
So I'm assuming that'll reflect in the accounts this month, am I right?

JAYATA
Nothing out of the ordinary sir. A bit slow even.

KALRA
Really? How slow is a bit slow?

JAYATA
Around the same as last month.

KALRA
Really? That's not what I've heard. I heard you gave Mr. Chawla quite the hard time the other day.

Jayata looks as if she's taken a little bit of a blow. Ghanti looks tense as well.

JAYATA
Nothing out of the ordinary, sir. Usual business.

Kalra steps closer to Jayata.

KALRA
Why don't you give us a minute Murli.

GHANTI
Sir-

JAYATA
Leave, Murli.

Ghanti mopes off.

Kalra takes a seat.

KALRA
Four Lakhs, Dewan.

JAYATA
Sir?

KALRA
I would say I'm impressed Chawla isn't an easy bargain.Something you certainly wouldn't have been capable of a few years ago, correct?

JAYATA
No, sir.

KALRA
So I feel like I've been a good teacher then?

Kalra peaks down at the paper that Jayata forgot to put away along with the money. All her accounts. He swivels it around and inspects it. Jayata looks straight ahead.

KALRA (CONT'D)
10 Lakhs and counting doesn't seem like a slow month, Dewan.

Silence from Jayata. Kalra stands up and places himself only a few inches away from Jayata's face.

KALRA (CONT'D)
(hushed)
Just because you run a station and have respect now, don't forget I put you here. You could have been nothing. Just another wannabe, woman superintendent if you had stuck to your own ways. Don't make me make you nothing again. Understood?

JAYATA
Sir.

Kalra steps back

KALRA
You've caught me on a good day. I'll only take my cut of what I've seen so far. 5 Lakhs in my account by tomorrow.

JAYATA
Yes sir.

KALRA
Very good.

Kalra starts making his way to the door.

KALRA (CONT'D)
Oh and Jayata tell Ghanti to deal with the protesters outside they're making such a ruckus I can't think.

Kalra EXITS by smashing through the saloon doors. Ghanti is standing right behind them with his ears pressed to the door and he gets smacked in the head.

KALRA (CONT'D)
Good. Maybe you'll learn something.

Ghanti scuttles back in apology and salutes Kalra. He goes back into the room where Jayata is sat at her desk but her thoughts seem elsewhere.

GHANTI
Maam, are you okay?

Jayata doesn't respond.

GHANTI (CONT'D)
Maam?

FLASHBACK.

EXT- OUTSIDE POLICE STATION- NIGHT.

A younger Jayata is trying hard to hold back tears as she lights up a cigarette. Some officers come out of the station and whisper and laugh. Kalra comes out and notices Jayata.

She notices him and quickly wipes away her tears.

KALRA
Tough day, superintendent?

JAYATA
No sir.

KALRA
Word spreads fast her Dewan. I hear whats going on.

JAYATA
I didn't do anything wrong sir.

KALRA
No I suppose not. But you didn't do anything right either.

Jayata looks at him.

KALRA (CONT'D)
I know your type. Starry eyed, full of dreams of being a good cop. An honest one. Am I right or am I right?

Jayata looks unfazed, she's heard this all before.

KALRA (CONT'D)
Jayata Dewan! Female officer ready to change the system. The world even.

Jayata chuckles a bit.

JAYATA
Maybe. But I don't know how to do that when trying to do my job, honestly is more of a crime here than anything we could convict someone for.

KALRA
I see you're a bit of a romantic,Dewan.
(MORE)

KALRA (CONT'D)
But sadly this world does't revolve around honesty does it? Money and respect, Dewan. Money and respect.

JAYATA
Well I've never had much money and maybe even less respect.

KALRA
Well surely that can't be true. Your husband?

Joya shakes her head

KALRA (CONT'D)
Well then family, must be overjoyed to have an honest cop for a daughter.

Jayata smirks

KALRA (CONT'D)
No?

JAYATA
Maybe you're the romantic, sir. The day I told my parents I wanted to be a cop, they wanted nothing to do with me. Then they realised I don't want to get married and certainly can't support them so I was effectively rendered useless.

KALRA
So the answer is so simple, Dewan. Get married.

JAYATA
Of course! Let me settle for some good for nothing who I can feed and raise kids for, for the rest of my life. My real dream!

KALRA
No much better than that! Marry this institution. Convert. Just one taste of what it's like to be respected in this world. One taste of shoving it all in your parents face.

Kalra acts like he's licking the taste off his fingers

KALRA (CONT'D)
Ahhhh. It has it's own intoxication, Dewan.

JAYATA
I'm not going to cheat on my first love. Honesty.

KALRA
And where has that gotten you? Crying like a little girl outside a police station with no pat on the back to go home to at the end of the day. A lonely life where even your parents couldn't find it within themselves to love you?

This strikes a cord somewhere.

JAYATA
No one's going to take me seriously.

KALRA
So make them. I'll help you.

JAYATA
Why do you want to help?

Kalra gets a bit uncomfortably close to Jayata. He starts swirling his finger on her arm.

KALRA
Lets just say I see something in you.

Jayata takes a step back. Kalra looks disappointed.

KALRA (CONT'D)
You let down your saintly act and earn me money and I'll make sure you're sitting on my desk one day.

JAYATA
How much?

KALRA
Oh very good! You're already asking the right kind of questions. 50/50.

Jayata looks at Kalra.