

Who Let The Dogs Out?

Act I Scene 1

(The office of "The Pune Guardian", a small newspaper in Pune. RENUKA:, a journalist, is seated at her table, looking through some papers. There is no typewriter on her table, nor a computer. The office is rather shabby and it is apparent that the newspaper is barely struggling along. In walks Mr. DESHPANDE, an ancient gentleman. He is slightly disoriented and walks right up to RENUKA.)

MR. DESHPANDE Madam! Oh Madam! Listen to me... Madam! Miss! I demand justice. Listen to me.... I am fed up of people just looking through me and I demand that you look at me and listen to me. I have something to say and I am going to have my say, come hell or gripe water. I am...

RENUKA: Calm down Mr.....?

MR. DESHPANDE: I am Deshpande – Shailesh Deshpande, and I demand justice. You hear me? I am not going to be shunted around. Tell me, how many departments do you have here?

RENUKA: *(Uncertainly)* Here?

MR. DESHPANDE: Yes yes here. Are you deaf? Can't you understand English?

RENUKA: Well, er... it's quite informal out here. We have a very flat organisation structure you know, Mr. David, the Editor, decided on a flat organisational structure after he heard that Dot Com companies had that kind of structure and it made them profitable. Hasn't made much difference here, I can tell you...

MR. DESHPANDE: *(Interrupting)* Never mind the management lesson, young lady. What is your name? What do you do here?

RENUKA: Er.... I am Renuka. I'm a journalist.

MR. DESHPANDE: Journalist eh? That's good. You are just the person I want to see.

RENUKA: Me? *(Flattered)* That's great! No one ever comes to see me you know...

MR. DESHPANDE: That is because you don't dress well ... you've got a nice face and a nice figure... You should dress well to show your figure. Girls nowadays have no problem showing their...

RENUKA: Er.. yes, yes, Mr. Deshpande. But I'm sure you came here for a specific purpose.

MR. DESHPANDE: Yes, I came to see you. Didn't I just tell you that? Are you deaf? My wife was deaf you know. That's why we had so many children.

RENUKA: Huh? I don't understand....

MR. DESHPANDE: Well, we live just behind the railway station and every night we'd be woken up by the trains. So I'd turn to my Kau – her name was Kaveri, you know, but I called her Kau out of love. So I'd turn to my Kau and say, "Tula Jhopayche hai ki kai? Meaning, "You want to go to sleep or what?" and she always said (*cupping his ear*) "Kai?" So...

RENUKA: (*Interrupting*) Er... yes, yes, I get your point. So what can...

MR. DESHPANDE: (*On a nostalgia trip*) Now all my children are gone. Bharat died when he was a baby. Swati died when my wife rolled over her. Ankur ...

RENUKA: Er... Mr. Deshpande, I truly sympathise with your tragedy. But what does this all have to do with why you're here?

MR. DESHPANDE: It has everything to do with why I'm here. Don't you young people ever listen? All my children are dead now... and my Kau also died last year...

RENUKA: Oh, you want to put a matrimonial ad? You'll have to meet Sheila in the outer office...

MR. DESHPANDE: Matrimonial? Matrimonial? (*getting more incensed*) What do you think I am? I am 70 years old! You think dead snakes can crawl again?

RENUKA: Dead snakes....? What... oh never mind! What do you want then?

MR. DESHPANDE: If you let me talk I will tell you no? This younger generation.... Always want to listen to your own voice. Never want to listen to the older generation. Even my Ankur, when he was alive...

RENUKA: (*Interrupting*) Er... Mr. Deshpande? What exactly have you come here for?

MR. DESHPANDE: I am telling you no? It is about injustice. Grave injustice...

RENUKA: Someone stole your grave?

MR. DESHPANDE: Will you listen to me? Why are you going on about graves? No sensitivity for an old man... Someone is trying to steal my house!

RENUKA: Er... you mean steal what's in your house? You can't steal a house you know, unless it's a mobile home and we don't have any of those in Pune...

MR. DESHPANDE: There you go again. Won't let an old man finish! I mean someone is trying to take over my house. My house! Where my Kau and I raised fifteen children! They're all gone now, you know, and someone is trying to throw me out and take my house. But I will not let him! I know who he is. He is that Chhota Paresh. He is a big goonda. I told him that if he troubles me I will go to the newspapers and let the dogs out of the bag!

RENUKA: Dogs out... (*Suddenly understanding*) Oh! Don't you mean let the cat out of the bag?

MR. DESHPANDE: I don't know what to say nowadays. You young people have changed the meaning of every animal! (*Reminiscing*) I remember when an Ass was a Donkey and a Pussy was a cat. Nowadays...

RENUKA: Er. yes yes I get your point....

MR. DESHPANDE: Well you haven't touched the dogs yet, except the female ones and I think it was my generation that did that. Anyway. So I always say let the dogs out of the bag. It is safer...

RENUKA: Er.. Yes....

MR. DESHPANDE: So I told him. I said if you trouble me I will let the dogs out of the bag. I'll spill the shengdanas (see note 1) to the newspaper and then you'll be in trouble. I am not going to sit back and let my house be stolen. My house! Where my Kau and I raised fifteen children! They're all gone now, you know... Bharat died when he was a baby. Swati died when my wife rolled over her. Ankur...

RENUKA: Er... yes, yes... I get the point. But can't you go to the police?

MR. DESHPANDE: Police? The Police do not help. That Inspector fellow just wouldn't listen to me. I tried to tell him. I said, "Inspector beta (see note 2), there is a goonda trying to steal my house, kalla ka (see note 3)?". You know, the house where my Kau and I raised fifteen children. They are all gone now, you know. Bharat..."

RENUKA: Er... and he didn't listen?

MR. DESHPANDE: He threw me out! Me! Shailesh Deshpande! He doesn't know who I am! In my days, I was a boxer you know. My Kau was always afraid I'd kill somebody someday. And now that Chhota Paresh is trying to muscle in. If I was younger I'd show him... And that Inspector... I'd show him too. Who does he think he is? Won't listen to an old man. I tried to tell him, you know. I said, "Inspector beta..." (*continues mumbling while Renuka speaks*)

RENUKA: (*Aside*) Well, I can't really blame him! So Mr. Deshpande, what do you want us to do?

MR. DESHPANDE: I told you didn't I? You young generation! Such scatterbrains.... Never ever listen! I want you to let the dogs out of the bag. Expose this Chhota Paresh. Let people know what a goonda he is. Maybe then the police will listen!

RENUKA: Okay, Mr. Deshpande. I will do a bit of investigative journalism. If there is any truth in your story....

MR. DESHPANDE: Truth? Story? You think I am telling you lies? Madam, I am known for my honesty. Honest Shailesh they called me in my younger days. You doubt that? I wish my Kau was here to tell you. My poor Kau! We raised fifteen children in that house, you know? She and I. Fifteen children. And now they're all gone. Bharat died...

RENUKA: (*Placating him*) Okay, okay, Mr. Deshpande. I'll look into it. Don't worry, I'll see to it that your plight is highlighted.

MR. DESHPANDE: Thank you my dear. And take an old man's advice... dress better. Don't feel shy to show your...

RENUKA: Okay, okay Mr. Deshpande, I'll take your advice. (*Standing up and seeing him to the door*) I'll see to everything, Mr. Deshpande, don't worry...

MR. DESHPANDE: (*As he walks to the door*) I knew you would help me. What other choice does an old man have? I will not give up my house to that goonda. Chhota Paresh his name is. You got that? Chhota Paresh. You want me to spell it for you? (*turning*) maybe I should write it down for you.

RENUKA: Er... no no... there's no need to write it down... I'll remember the name... Chhota Paresh...

MR. DESHPANDE: Yes, yes... like that movie fellow.... He's a big goonda...

RENUKA: Who? The movie fellow? Oh, that's just acting you know...

MR. DESHPANDE: No No! You young people never listen! That Chhota Paresh is the goonda. He threatened to take my house. My house! Where my Kau and I...

RENUKA: Yes, Mr. Deshpande... where you raised fifteen children.... Don't worry... I'll look into it. Now you just go along home and I'll look into it....

(*Mr. DESHPANDE exits. RENUKA: goes back to her chair and looks up at the ceiling*)

RENUKA: Poor old man... Got no one to talk to, I suppose... Well, it takes all kinds....

