

**Sample:**

## **Chapter I: Arlette & Hemadri**

In the midst of an Indian city, a ragged child led a sturdy young man through a warren of ramshackle houses, shanties, and shacks. They were at once brightly colored and dusty grey and formed a jumble that obscured what might stretch beyond them. They did not lie on any sort of grid but seemed plunked down at random, allowing only angular footpaths among them. Acrid diesel fumes stifled the air and stung the eyes while the sound of traffic ground in the near distance.

The child proceeded knowingly while the young man followed with a step of slightly specious confidence. The boy was in rags. The young man had a craggy face and a shake of curly black hair, and was dressed in worn and faded but very clean khaki pants and shirt. Khaki is the color of dust; it is the word for dust in the language of the surrounding city. The cleanness of his clothing seemed a sort of defiance of the dust, which sifted everywhere.

The child slipped under a branch of a neem tree that the young man pushed aside, and turned a corner, which revealed a vista of excavation: partly exposed mud brick walls, which curved and staggered, most worn down to half height, heaps of mud bricks, of stone pieces perhaps once wall facing, other ditches, piles of dirt... a ditch cut into a wide mound of earth. The ditch was a meter wide and about three meters deep at the center of the mound, which spread over about 50 meters. The ditch faded to nothing at the ends where the mound sloped to the level of the surrounding cityscape. Three canvass awnings stretched on poles sheltered part of the excavation. A cinderblock shed with a metal door stood at the edge of the open space. The boy held out his begging hand. The young man had

only a visitor's acquaintance with the boy's language, but asked him if he lived on the street. The child replied that he lived at home with his family. They shared understanding that he was lying. The young man gave him an unusually large tip.

The boy asked, using respectful verb forms, "Shall I wait?" The young man paused, spied out a European woman sitting at a folding table beside the cinder block house and gestured the boy away.

Every few feet in the ditch stood a pole banded with colored paint like a ring snake. At the top of each dangled a floret of white paper strips each marked with a daub of paint matching a stripe, some with written notes.

Skinny, weathered women with knobby joints wearing bright red and yellow saris sat on their heels in the bottom of the cut handling dirt with trowels. Each had a small plastic trowel and a large, yellow plastic pan. A few small picks lay in the trench, and, from time to time, a woman loosened more soil from the wall of the cut with a pick. They crumbled lumps to dust between their thumb and fore fingers, some gently and speculatively, some dully, others with a sort of bitter aggressive energy.

The European woman sat on a camp chair at a table under one of the awnings. She had a stack of books beside her, some photographic equipment, and a sheet of white paper before her scattered with what looked like dark, irregular rocks, which she was examining carefully with a magnifying glass. A CD player was softly playing rock music in French. She too was wearing khaki, a loose-fitting blouse, pants, and a plinth helmet. Beside her desk at table height was a shallow box with a screen bottom suspended in a device like a giant tuning fork made of pipe. The screen had gaps the size of two fingers.

The young man had walked firmly but not confidently to the table where the young European woman was already working. She looked up with a friendly, respectful smile. He stopped before her and asked in English, "Can I speak to you in English?"

“Yes,” she said, “ I speak some English.” She had a French accent, distinct but not heavy. “You must be Hemadri Chandragupta.” She had rehearsed pronouncing the name, which the director had written for her on a slip of paper. Their conversation progressed in the slightly stilted manner of people who share only a language they have learned in school.

“Yes,” he said, both embarrassed and arrogantly acknowledging her knowing his name. “I will replace Mr. Panditharadhya who has regrettably fallen ill. You must be Miss Arlette du Bussoin (He pronounced her name Boo-so-in as you might pronounce it in English.) the field supervisor.” She put out her hand and they shook hands. His grip was firmer than she expected from Indian men. She wondered if he thought it was an English grip, and he had shaken hands with her because they were speaking in English as they might have kissed cheeks if they were speaking in French. She had heard from the dig director that he was an engineering student who had no experience with archeology but had been hired because he had a patron with influence with the Institute, the French Institute of Pondicherry, Arlette’s birthplace, and one of the sponsors of this dig. Such influence troubled her for India, which she cared for. At first, she thought he was probably a Brahmin, and that evoked her hostility to the caste system but, no, an intuition told her he was not. She liked him immediately for his mixture of confidence and vulnerability, and for some tortured quality that promised meaning in him.

“I understand you are new to archeology,” she said.

“That is unfortunately correct,” he said. She did not note the singsong quality of his voice that a native English speaker would have heard, as he did not hear her accent. “But I am an engineer. Perhaps I will have something to contribute to mechanical perfection of your enterprise.”

“I hope you will,” she said. Just then, one of the sifters signaled and she said, "Did the director explain what you do."

“He explained, but did not specify the details fully.” She thought he had not explained, or Chandragupta had not understood, but he did not want to criticize a higher-up.

She stood, “Will you let me show you?”

“Oh certainly, please do,” he said a little insincerely she thought. She walked over to the trench and explained that when a woman signaled him, he should pick up the loads of dirt from her along with a piece of paper with a mark on it, for the women were illiterate, and bring the load to the desk. As they spoke, the women kept their eyes down and did not look at him but seemed very aware of him; nor did he acknowledge them as people. As she indicated, he wheeled the dirt up beside the screen in its pipe frame. With a plastic scoop, they lifted the dirt from the wheelbarrow to the frame. She asked him to wheel the barrow under the frame and she showed him how together they could shake it. When they had shaken the dirt through, three pieces of broken pottery remained. One of the sifters signaled for the barrow, and he briskly turned to respond. When they had repeated the process he looked about the dig and saw a high spot where he went to watch, alert but with a craggy indifference, for the signal from the sifters.