

SINDHU AND JEET'S DETECTIVE AGENCY

CHITRA SUNDAR



BLOOMSBURY

ILLUSTRATED BY
AMBERIN HUQ

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ALL ABOARD

The dimly lit boarding gate at Chennai International Airport smelt of bleach. Sindhu flipped through the pages of her book – *The Handbook for Young Detectives* – and put it away.

She was going on a holiday to London with her parents, and most importantly her best friend Jeet, for a whole week. Yay! The trouble was that Jeet actually wanted to do sightseeing in London while Sindhu wanted to

solve mysteries. They were, after all, Sindhu and Jeet's Detective Agency.

According to her book, detectives almost never went on holidays. Even if they did, they were pulled into solving mysteries. Also, detectives preferred flying business class where they had the space to discuss clues and interview suspects if they needed to do so. If only her parents could afford to fly them business class!

Mum and Dad were snoozing, catching up on sleep since they had had to leave for the airport at two in the morning. Jeet was playing with his new gadget – the latest model of

pen-shaped spy-cam with *still, audio and video capabilities* (his words).

“Jeet!” Sindhu called, waving a folded sheet of paper. “Guess what this is?”

Jeet shrugged.

“The commendation letter from our headteacher Mrs Kandasamy for solving mysteries at the school.”

“Why did you bring that?”



“Just in case we get to solve mysteries on the holiday!”

Jeet rolled his eyes. “No way,” he insisted. “I’m going to be a tourist! Not a detective, for the next one week.”

Let’s see about that, thought Sindhu, carefully putting the letter in her jacket pocket and pulling out her OWL – Observation and Watch Log. The motto of every detective, according to *The Handbook for Young Detectives*, was Observe, Watch and Log.

“Say cheese!” shouted Jeet. “You’re the 100th photo!”

Sindhu made a face at the camera and started logging her observations. Every entry had three sections.

#	Who	Where	What
1	a friend/detective turned photographer with a pen-camera	in the opposite seat	taking useless photos of the waiting area
2	a female cleaner wearing a sari, but with a blue uniform shirt over it	near the ladies' toilet	pushing a cleaning cart away from the toilet
3	a male cleaner dressed in the uniform blue shirt and in blue trousers	behind the female cleaner	sweeping the floor
4	airline staff - one with a long ponytail, the other with short hair	at the boarding counter	typing, laughing
5	everyone else	in uncomfortable bucket chairs	sleeping, dozing, snoozing, taking useless photos

“Sindhu!” called Jeet. “Please can you get your dad’s phone?”

“Why?”

“This camera connects to a phone via a USB,” explained Jeet. “So we can look at the pictures, sound recording or videos.”

“Never wake a snoozing dad or a sleeping bear,” said Sindhu, “if you want to live long enough to see London.”

Jeet giggled as he turned away to take more pictures. Sindhu returned to her observation subjects. The cleaner man was gone. The cleaner woman was just pretending to wipe the door. She was looking in another direction completely.

Sindhu's detective instinct went on high alert. Something was not right. She needed to gather evidence. But if she asked Jeet to help, he would refuse. So, she needed a ruse.

“Jeet, how about a holiday project?”

“About what?”

“About professions around the world,” said Sindhu. “Look! You can start with that cleaner.”

“Genius!” said Jeet, turning on his camera to record the woman. “I’ll record a video.”

The PA system crackled. “We will begin boarding in the next ten minutes,” the staff announced in three languages.

Passengers woke up from their slumber and started moving towards the boarding gate, blocking Jeet's view.

"I need to get closer," said Jeet as he walked ahead.

Sindhu followed him.

"The cleaner, she's gone," said Jeet.

"Wait!" said Sindhu. "What's that?"

"Some rag," said Jeet.

"Not any rag," said Sindhu. "It's her cleaning cloth."

"Oh no, careless cleaner," mocked Jeet. "I'll find another cleaner in London who isn't as careless. It's time to board. Come on!"

"Maybe she's just around the corner," said Sindhu, pulling Jeet with her.

“Sindhu!” called Mum. “Don’t go far.”

As they turned a corner, they
bumped into the cleaning cart.

“That’s strange!” said Sindhu.

“No, it’s not,” said Jeet. “Please don’t
imagine a mystery. She must be on her
break or something.”

*

The hall was busier. Sindhu and Jeet
spotted a few cleaners dressed in blue
shirts over saris. But none of them were
the woman they had seen before.

“If she’s on a break,” said Sindhu, “she
must be in the STAFF ONLY room.”

“Doesn’t matter,” said Jeet. “I don’t
want to miss our holiday because

we went looking for a cleaner on a toilet break.”

But Sindhu had already opened the door and entered the cleaning closet marked STAFF ONLY.

It was lined with metal shelves filled with cleaning products, bins and rolls of bin liners. In one corner, a pantry was set up with a tray of empty glass tumblers, a kettle and some mugs for tea.

“You never listen!” hissed Jeet as he followed her inside. “Look! It’s a cleaning closet. There’s nothing else.”

“Shh! Listen.”

“What?”

“Can’t you hear voices?”

They moved closer to the wall on the opposite side of the room. Garbled sounds came from the other side.

Jeet pulled Sindhu towards the door.

“Hang on!” whispered Sindhu. She tiptoed to the pantry and picked two glass tumblers. Jeet sighed and took one glass from her hand.

Sindhu placed the open side of her tumbler flat on the wall and pressed her right ear to its bottom. Jeet did the same. Then he had an idea. He held up his spy-cam near the tumbler too.



They could hear clearly what was being said on the other side. It was like magic! But really it was science – the resonance of the air waves through the glass.

“We need four bags – the easier to open the better, anything that will open with the universal luggage key.”

“Boarding has started!” said a woman’s voice. “We must hurry.”

Whoever was on the other side was going to steal from passengers’ luggage. Sindhu and Jeet’s Detective Agency needed to stop them.

Then they heard a new voice, speaking in a hoarse whisper.

Sindhu leaned in closer, pushing