

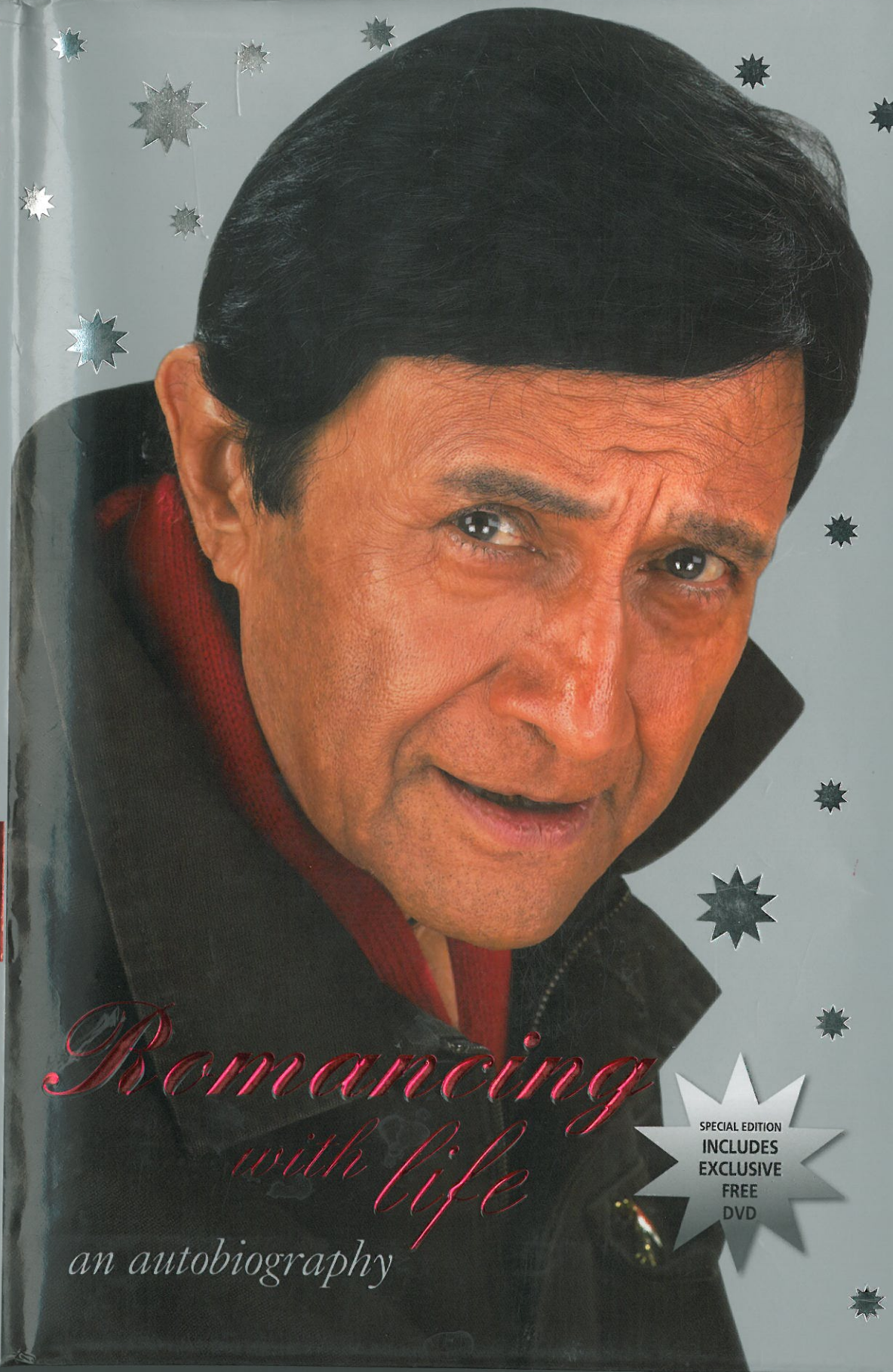


*Romancing
with life*



DEV
ANAND

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*Romancing
with life*
an autobiography

SPECIAL EDITION
INCLUDES
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DVD

'On . . .' I kept looking at her, as if I was scanning a photograph.

'What?' she insisted.

'If somebody . . .' I paused again, my look still fixed on her.

'Wh-at?' she prolonged the word, becoming self-conscious.

'If somebody has a role that suits you—the way you are!'

She blushed and looked at her friend for some assurance and then looked back at me.

'Actually my mum wants to speak with you—she is a great fan of yours. Would you be willing?' she changed the topic suddenly.

'It's always the mother who comes first,' I thought, 'then the daughter.' Girls who loved me and longed for me after seeing my films have now become mothers, and have, in turn, passed their own dream to their daughters, who come and see me now with the same intensity of feeling and adoration!

She waited eagerly for my answer with the expression of an innocent child on her face, as if waiting for a toy to be handed to her. 'Tell your mum to give me a call,' I said.

Her mum's call came the next day. 'I am Mink's mother, Mrs Singh, from Germany. Can I come and meet you sometime?'

I was about to respond, but she went on. 'With a present I have for you from Germany.'

'Do come and see me, but only on condition that you don't bring any present,' I replied.

She laughed very charmingly.

'I shall come with my daughter,' she said.

Both mother and daughter came to see me, dressed in the latest fashionable clothes, competing with each other in style. They had several rings on their fingers, of different hues and designs, as well as a clutch of bracelets and necklaces. The entire room glittered.

Mink ended up playing the second lead in my next film *Pyar Ka Tarana*.

Sixty-three

'Saab! A saab keeps telephoning, and leaves his number every time, always insisting it is very important,' said my chowkidar one evening as I got back home.

'Did he mention his name?' I enquired.

'There on the table, saab! I wrote it three times. Three times he called!' he said.

I looked at the slip of paper. He had written 'Copenhagen' along with the caller's name.

'Copenhagen!' I muttered, and then forgot about it, leaving the paper next to the rest of the mail piled up on the table.

As I entered the gate of my studio the next day the accountant standing at the far end asked me if I would like to take a call from Copenhagen, which the operator was holding.

'Copenhagen again,' I muttered to myself, and said, 'Tell the operator I shall speak to him.'

The caller was Harwani, whose name was on the slip of paper lying near the telephone at home. His voice was subdued, and very meekly he said that he was interested in getting a film directed by me in Denmark.

'But I don't work for anybody outside my own fold, Mr Harwani,' I told him politely.

'But you do meet people, don't you?' he asked.

'All the time,' I said.

'Can I, then, meet with you?'

'Certainly.'

He came a couple of days later. He was dressed in a suit and was well spoken, but timid, the expression in his eyes hidden behind the thick spectacles he wore all the time. He was carrying a briefcase,

which I later discovered he always carried. He was extremely respectful, and I was polite in return.

'Mr Harwani, I make films only for myself. I don't make them for outsiders,' I repeated.

'Don't treat me as an outsider. We all love you. Have you ever been to Copenhagen?' he said.

'Not in a long time. I have never visited the Scandinavian countries properly.'

'Visit them now, on my invitation. Not only Denmark. I shall drive you to Sweden and Norway as well!'

The invitation was tempting and I answered, 'The moment I have a little spare time, and am in a holiday mood, I shall let you know.'

A first-class air ticket arrived soon from Copenhagen. Harwani had been insistent, behaving as if he was some long-lost friend, and I gave in. He had left several glamorous fashion magazines from Denmark, which his briefcase was filled with, for me to look at. There were photographs of trendy models wearing the latest Scandinavian designs in fashion, laid out and printed in great artistic style. As the magazines lay open on the table, speaking of the élan and class of the Scandinavian countries, I was enticed.

In Copenhagen, Harwani was at the airport to receive me with a lovely bouquet of the finest fresh flowers. A red carpet was laid out for me. He drove me to the best hotel in the elegant city, and booked me into its best suite, with its windows opening out to the great expanse outside.

Harwani left on my table a packet of Danish kronas, in case I needed money to spend until I exchanged my own money into the local currency. The next day he took me home to meet his family, which consisted of a very hospitable wife, a son and two lovely daughters, the elder one very pretty. She opened the door as he rang the bell, and instantly said, 'Hi, I am Pinky!' in a very European style.

'Hi Pinky!' I responded in a star-like manner. She was a loyal fan and so was her entire family. They had just seen *Hum Naujawan*. The son joined us soon, and they all took me for dinner to a very popular place called Scala, full of merry-making people, with nothing but laughter and the zest for living on their faces. Later we went to

Tivoli, the city of magic and fantasy, of joy and entertainment that Walt Disney must have been inspired by

I had been to Tivoli earlier, holding Saira Bano's hand, romancing with her in *Pyar Mohabbat*, directed by Shankar Mukherji. While shop-gazing on the streets there, I had come across a cap that went on to create a cult for itself.

My *Jewel Thief* cap was bought in Copenhagen.

And the same 'Jewel Thief' was in the city again, exploring it anew.

From Tivoli we went to Christiania, for which Copenhagen is famous as well as infamous. It is full of drugs and drug peddlers, and throbbing with a young crowd living their lives fast and under the cloud of an eternal smoke that keeps them intoxicated with themselves, and away from the worries of the world. It all makes a very colourful picture, half-naked bodies with long beards and old arty jewellery, free in their minds and freer with their bodies, everyone enjoying the fruits of the free-for-all kingdom legalized by the Danish government.

In one day, I captured the essence of Copenhagen. Some of the women were so beautiful that one wished one was King Henry VIII of England, who had so many wives.

A couple of days later, we drove to the border of Denmark, a couple of hours away. We took a ferry and soon we were in Sweden, in Stockholm, the home of Ingrid Bergman, Greta Garbo and Ingmar Bergman, each a movie legend. I felt a natural rapport with the place.

I stood silent for a while at a road-crossing, where the traffic was fast. Right across, the gold of the sun was melting into different colours as it sank in the ocean, lighting up tiny specks of clouds as well. The lights in the street were suddenly lit, turning the square into a psychedelic fantasia. Short skirts and low-necked blouses, high-heeled shoes and sexy-looking sandals worn on long beautifully shaped legs, manicured nails, the hooting of horns and the banter of young girls, all centred around a huge poster of a ravishing nude, with frontals that spelt paradise for the young males milling around and with half-open painted lips that looked ready to swallow up all that is heaven on earth.

Back in Copenhagen, a trip to Norway was planned. Harwani drove like a seasoned driver, and I was like a curious child wanting to see, imbibe, learn and enjoy all that was once in my imagination and was now a reality, passing in front of my eyes as a panorama. The road was snowbound at places, trees denuded of leaves for the winter was right ahead, lonely isolated villages with dim lights eyeing you through the mist shrouding the wooden houses and sideway inns.

My mind was racing with new ideas, faster than the speedometer of the car. Ahead of us, though far away, was the North Pole. But first Oslo, the capital of Norway, where we stopped. There were very few people on the road, which glistened with snow. We went to a Norwegian pub, our bodies shivering as we got out of the heated car, our hands and noses and ears in danger of getting frozen. There was a warm sound of joy and laughter emanating from the pub as we stepped in. It seemed the entire young crowd of Oslo was huddled together there, with glasses of wine clinking, hands clasped in hands, rosy cheeks and pink faces looking like they were part of the vibrant portrait of a great romance. Our entry drew curious glances. 'Hi,' I called out to be welcomed, vaporous fumes flying out of my mouth to mingle with the jollity of the atmosphere. Half the gathering responded with a 'Hi' in a chorus, and the other half raised their glasses, inviting us for a drink. A Norwegian girl made a loud remark. I could not understand it, but her expression conveyed everything. I took off my cap, ruffled my hair and waved at her. There was laughter all around that lent great warmth to the gathering that had come in from the freezing cold outside.

Back in Copenhagen, I had made up my mind to shoot a film in Denmark. It would be a new experience.

'Give me a couple of months to get ready. I shall let you know,' I told Harwani.

When an idea takes birth, it has to be given time to grow. I start living with it, in both my conscious and subconscious states of mind. The nucleus has to take the shape of a story before I can plan the structure and the schedule.

Anita Ayub came into the picture suddenly. She was a Pakistani girl on holiday in India, the first and probably the last from that

country to win a title in a beauty contest. She had deep blue eyes and a Snow White-like complexion, brown hair with a touch of gold in them, and a figure that could be kept in a showcase for people to admire. A real Punjabi Pathan. She came to see me as a fan, and ended up as the star of *Pyar Ka Tarana*.

There was another girl to be cast in the film, besides of course Mink whom I had already finalized for the second lead. She had to be a girl from Denmark. I made my second trip to Copenhagen to try and find her. Copenhagen was full of girls, immensely pretty and as fresh as roses. An advertisement had already appeared in Danish newspapers and I, too, had been on Danish television, talking about my wish to shoot a film there. Some people had started recognizing me in public places. Girls started turning up in large numbers for interviews. English is popularly spoken in Denmark, so there was no difficulty in communicating with the young crowd. They were all free and uninhibited, with strong sophisticated personalities.

Many of the Danish girls were quite tall, the height enhancing their appeal and elegance. One of them, who sought an interview, was six feet eight inches tall. As she stood next to me, talking in fluent English, carrying her height on her feet with assured charm, I couldn't take my eyes off her. She was sixteen or seventeen, broadly built yet delicate looking, her auburn hair combed back from her broad forehead and knotted, with apple-red cheeks and an angelic smile. She was God's special creation, specially chosen to stand tall among all the other pretty women. As she walked out of the room after an exquisitely feminine 'Thank you', I kept looking at her legs long after they made their exit, entering the chambers of my fantasies. I thought I could plan a full-length feature film around her. But in *Pyar Ka Tarana*, I couldn't find a place for her, especially opposite Manu Gargi, son of the famous playwright Balwant Gargi, whom I had already signed for the male lead.

I told Harwani to take me to a dancing place that the young crowd of Copenhagen frequented the most one evening. There I saw a girl sitting amongst her group of friends. She was in the full bloom of youth, smiling away in great abandon, capturing the attention of everybody around her. Very innocent looking and fresh as a morning flower, she caught my eye. She seemed right for the part I had conceived.

As the waitress came round to serve me my drink, I asked for a sheet of blank paper, and scribbled a note to the young girl. The waitress handed the note over. On receiving the note, the girl looked at me. I waved at her. She nodded and graciously walked towards me.

'You are a beautiful girl. I couldn't help wanting to be noticed by you, through my move,' I said.

'Some of my friends at the table have recognized you. You were on television a couple of days ago,' she said.

'I was. Did you watch it?' I asked.

'No.'

'Won't you sit down?'

'I have my friends there. You wanted to meet me?'

'I am sure you must have guessed why!'

'Perhaps.'

'If approached, would you be interested to act in my film?'

'I have never done any acting.'

'Would you, now? It's a good part, for somebody like you!'

She half-nodded.

'You'll love doing it, and the world shall watch and admire you,' I enthused.

She nodded again, but asked, 'Will I be able to act?'

'That's my responsibility—that is, if we both agree to begin with.'

She smiled enchantingly.

'Come over to the Scandinavia Hotel, to my suite,' I said, and scribbled the number down. 'If you've finally made up your mind.'

'Can I bring my father with me?'

'Anybody you want.'

The girl's name was Maja Riis, the first name pronounced Maya. She was Swedish by birth, but working and studying in Denmark. Her father worked in Denmark as well and drove back every day to Stockholm where he lived. He was a charming educated man. I took Maja down to the lawns of the hotel, and took a short video test of hers to see how she looked and behaved in front of the camera. And the next day, after having assured myself, I asked Harwani to add her to the list of *Pyar Ka Tarana*.

The Danish portion of *Pyar Ka Tarana* was shot non-stop in Copenhagen, on some of its best locations: in the streets, in public

entertainment places, inside Tivoli, in a boat along the harbour, and in the outskirts of Copenhagen, in open fields, and in a village with a windmill. Filming was done with people going about their normal business, on the beaches, where young uninhibited girls lay naked basking in the sun, and in a swimming pool, with them diving into the water with just their panties on. Nobody bothered or took note of the cameras as they rolled, catching them in their natural element. It is an open society, its doors welcoming all those who want to enter its gates, in the same spirit and with the same freedom of mind.

One of the best features of the film was the opening sequence which covered the annual Danish festival in the streets of Copenhagen, where women with sensuous figures flaunted their sex with nothing on except scanty bras and jewelled transparent panties, dancing in total abandon, competing with one another, marching in processions, shaking their breasts and hips to the beat of the rhythm that enhanced their provocative nudity. As people around feasted their eyes on nature's most delightful wonder for man, a woman, my cameras went wild and the dancers wilder, knowing that they were being captured on film.

The making of *Pyar Ka Tarana* was an enjoyable experience, except that it led to some unpleasantness between the two partners. I realized later that I had made the biggest blunder of my life by joining hands with somebody as my partner in business, for while you can carry the burden of your own conscience, you cannot carry the burden of somebody else's conscience with you. Making the film was an absolute labour of love, and artistically satisfying, but the business aspect of it was deplorable. When two minds get together, one of an artistic bent and the other financial-minded, caution is the watchword.