



The Malaysians

Somewhere near Seremban – 2001



It had been two weeks since Razali had died on the golf course, and four of us gathered to remember him.

Perched atop a small hill near Seremban is the weekend home of my old friend Jaspal Singh, the fearsome barrister-at-law. Nobody since the captain of the *Titanic* has fought harder for a lost cause than Jaspal. I've had the privilege of watching

him in action in the court of law and saw him practically reduce his opponent to tears as he ripped through the flimsy argument with brilliant counter-argument, well-placed traps, feigned ignorance and cutting sarcasm. Of course Jaspal lost the case, that was a foregone conclusion, but he continues doggedly in his mission to resuscitate our legal system which he likes to call, “A shop window. It’s all bright and shiny from the outside but when you step inside you find out that everything is either out of stock or the line has been discontinued.” Despite crossing swords with the Director of Public Prosecutions and defending more political reprobates than is safe (they are perforce the poorest clients), his legal skills and tenacity are so obvious that he has always been the lawyer of choice for our finest financial reprobates (perforce the richest clients) and has built a successful practice.

I first met Jaspal many, many years ago on the hockey field when his team ended our long run of victories. We’d heard about them and had prepared a game plan based on our strengths of silky passing and movement like untouchable shadows. But then this group of Punjabis arrived on their bicycles and proceeded to beat us black and blue. Jaspal was their midfield lynchpin and it fell to me to contain him, but he simply brushed me aside as if I wasn’t even there. No matter what I tried to do to him, his tall muscular frame seemed to be impervious to pain and when he rolled around on the ground theatrically as if I had broken his leg (thereby gaining the penalty corner from which they scored the winning goal), I knew then that he was marked for greatness. Although Jaspal still likes to call himself a sportsman, it has been a long time since he has exercised at all and now his body is almost entirely spherical, topped off with a turban.