

The Meeting

Shilpa shut down her laptop. Quickly, but calmly she untangled the cables, picked up the equipment and packed it in the bag. It was evening and she was ready to leave. She reached for her purse. She checked her mobile. No missed calls or messages. She dialed her mother's number. "I'm starting for home, do you want me to get something on the way?". Some guests were due that evening. So, her mom asked her to get some sweets. She gently slung the purse over her shoulder and picked up the laptop bag. Saying a smiley bye to her team members, she walked out of office. It was work well done at office, as usual and she was happy as usual.

Shilpa picked up the sweets en-route and reached home. After a quick wash, she was in kitchen to help her mother. The guests arrived soon. Some distant relatives with no agenda in general. She helped set out the dinner. And all started eating and chatting. Soon, the chat gravitated towards Shilpa's marriage. She was turning 26 in 2 months. This was high time any Indian girl should be married.

The elderly woman in the guests asked Shilpa, "what kind of boy are you looking for?".

"Umm.., I haven't thought about it yet", came the reply.

"At your age, I already had a boy 4 years old. You should start looking.", said the woman.

It was right. Shilpa never thought about it. She had spent most of her time studying. And she did well. She got a good job too. She was hard-working. She was sincere to her parents and considered their opinion before taking any major decision. She was a good girl.

The guests ate, talked and left by night. Shilpa helped her mom clean up. Shortly, she wished good night to her parents and entered her bedroom. Tired, she made her bed and fell on it.

She did not sleep immediately. why do people get married? she had no answer to this question. she was having a good life. loving parents. good education. good work. then, she thought of her other female friends. many of them were married already. in particular, she thought of Priya.

Priya and Shilpa studied together in college. Priya was a brave girl. She was outgoing and smart. Priya was friendly with most of the class, guys and girls. She was always ahead in outdoor and sports activities. Shilpa was more reserved and concentrated on studies. Although, with opposite nature, they gelled well. By last year of college, Priya was going around with a guy called Rahul.

Once, Shilpa queried, "What do you two do together?"

Priya answered, "Just hang out, watch movies, talk, etc."

Shilpa never got the point. She was content with her curriculum and work.

She woke up at 7 in the morning. In an hour, she had helped her mother and got ready for

office. As she was leaving her mom said, "Try to come early today, there are some guests"; "Ok", Shilpa said.

She returned early in the evening. She was surprised to see her father home so early. The mother looked in hurry at kitchen. Looked like she was preparing something special. Shilpa went straight to the kitchen. Her mother told her, "Get ready, get fresh, get dressed. The boy's family would arrive in an hour."

"What?" Shilpa almost shouted.

"Yes, the boy is nice. the family is good.", said the mother.

"Should we not talk before doing this kind of thing?", Shilpa was getting really angry.

"It's just a meeting. Now, go before your father gets angry".

Reluctantly, Shilpa got ready. She was fuming inside, but composed on the outside. The boy and the family arrived. Shilpa did not care to look at them. She kept arranging the snacks and tea. In a while, the two families were sitting across each other and talking. Most of the time, the boy's mother spoke about her family and relatives and the boy of course. The boy was just looking around and kept stealing looks at Shilpa. Shilpa just waited to get over with it.

The topics soon shifted to Shilpa and the boy was encouraged to talk.

He asked the first question, "What's your name?"

Shilpa, thinking, as if he doesn't know; replied "Shilpa, what is your name?"

"Ashok", the boy said.

"What is your education, what do you do?"

"I have done my engineering studies and working for a multinational firm."

"Oh, good."

"What are your hobbies?"

"Painting, traveling, cooking."

"Nice"

"What are your future plans?"

The questions continued. Shilpa answered briefly every time and hoped there were no more questions.

As soon as the boy stopped, his mother started.

"What do you cook?"

"What have you studied?"

Many questions were repeats. And it seemed like she did not want to wait for an answer before the next question. Shilpa, by now, good at the answering routine, kept her calm.

After an hour and a half, the meet was over. The family left. The mother turned to Shilpa and asked by gesture, "What do you think?". Shilpa did not respond.

Over the next few months, the routine continued. Almost every fortnight, there would be a candidate. The same question-answer routine. The same mother. And even the same snacks. By

this time, Shilpa had started wondering if all people are so boring and predictable. It was almost like a business. You evaluated the candidate, the family, the job and you have the meeting. You ask the same questions. Then, think about the deal. And after every boy, there would be more lined up. The boys generally tried to be nice. They asked appropriate questions. They tried to look good. Some of them tried to show off. The mothers were worse. Always judging. Shilpa was getting tired of it.

The good thing about Shilpa was she never lost her cool. She forgot about any meeting in five minutes. And got back to work. The work was where her domain was. She was diligent and patient in getting her work done. She was satisfied with it. She always looked forward to going to office everyday. She was well liked by her colleagues and maintained a good professional relationship with them.

Soon, the work increased due to project deadlines and the meetings reduced. She was busier. Now, she would not even have time to help her mother. Weeks passed like this. The project was nearing end. as usual, she was enjoying the work. Working more, taking a fewer breaks. The breaks were mostly to fetch a glass of water from the small pantry outside of the main hall. She would bustle in and out of door once in a while.



One day, as she was carrying a glass full of water and hurrying towards the glass door of the main hall, she saw a guy walking to the door from the other side, in hurry and into a world of his own. As she wondered if she should let him pass first, she did not notice that the guy had stopped and held the door open for her. She was walking too fast and struck the glass of water against the door handle. The water splashed all over. More than half of it on the guy's shirt. Shilpa was very embarrassed and stopped, not saying anything. She would rarely get into such a situation. She looked at the guy, drenched, with some water on his face, and said "I am sorry. My mistake." She expected an irritated look and a quick termination of this situation. Instead, the guy stood cool, looked straight into her eyes and said, "It's a rather hot day. I was on my way to wash my face anyway." And bringing a huge smile over his tight lips, "Some mistakes are worth keeping".

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