



Prologue

‘Arranged marriage?’ my mom screamed as soon as I uttered those words.

‘Arranged marriage?’ she repeated one more time as I kept looking at her.

‘Arranged marriage?’ she screamed third time as I kept nodding.

It reminded me of some sensational scene in one of those soap operas where the ‘breaking words’ are registered in your mind with its shock waves doing rounds on everybody around as random as laundryman, domestic help, driver, right from their head to toe.

‘Yes mom, I am keen on an arranged marriage,’ I repeated before she started walking towards me and the focus shifted to her footsteps running at the rate of a few millimeters per hour.

‘At that rate mom would end up like that poor last player in the Cricket team facing the deadliest bowler,’ Ala, my sister said with a blank face. Metaphor was Ala’s usual

form of speech. 'That is the only form which can do justice to her 'advocate' status; profession of 'rarest of rare words',' I thought.

My mom got apprehensive at the idea of finding a guy 'suitable' for me. Even I pitied her calculating the time and energy she will have to put in now to find a guy for me. Moreover she was not used to it as both of my sisters had opted for love marriages. I wanted to add the exception against my name which seemed to my family what the idea of 'landing on the moon' would have seemed to the scientists for the first time. Worst part, there was not even scope for the 'conspiracy theory'.

As everyone was bracing up to this new announcement by me, my dad was busy listening to 'All India Radio' news in the balcony. If AIR ever decided to give away any award for brand loyalty, my dad would have broken all the records and bagged this award. At times I wonder whether it is his unrelenting love for AIR for last thirty years or his unbreakable shield against his wife's 'NAG TILL BRAINWASHED' binge which has been followed religiously by my 'pious' mom. As I kept repeating my

decision, the discussion reached the crescendo. At last my dad came into the hall holding his transistor radio close to his ear. We all stared at him to help him acknowledge our existence in the same house.

'The longer she interacts with the guy the lesser chance we have of getting her married. So arranged marriage can only rescue us,' he muttered and went into the bedroom.

The patriarch of the family gave his verdict grabbing the least footage. Again one more round of shock waves! Exchanging of glances...echoes doing rounds from head to toe...enough fodder for next endless episodes to tom-tom the great saga of my arranged marriage!

One

‘A love marriage is like reading the novel from the middle,’ my cousin would say this to defend arranged marriages.

I discovered the penchant for arranged marriages lately as my friends kept telling me how interesting it can get to find your value in the market and how you get to act pricey as per the demand and supply forces in place.

‘You officially get to meet so many guys,’ my friend once said to me.

I had my own logic about it. Adventure! Thrill! I wanted to try the fun of an arranged marriage. Now it was the time to decide how to go about it. I called my ‘think tank’ up and fixed up the meeting over dinner at ‘Bombay Blue’ restaurant in Milan Mall next Saturday.

It was Monday. There were still five more days to go for the great meeting with my think tank! There was nothing challenging to do in the office. As usual my boss had gone out of India to sign some business deals and I was

asked to prepare a presentation which of course would be presented only on Saturday. My team would hold presentation sessions every Saturday to discuss the events that took place in that week. Of course, the onus of making the presentation always lay on me being the only MBA in my team. I was the head of my team which consisted of three colleagues each from Sales, IT and Marketing departments. My team would report to my immediate boss (COO of the company). The presentation part would be attended by all. But the later 'analysis' part would be hijacked by my boss. Other members of my team would be more than happy about this fact as poor graduates were still in the 'sane human hood' phase of their life. I would envy them as my boss would expect me to love this 'analysis session' blindly, madly and deeply, thanks to my MBA degree from one of the pompous institutes! To make it even more life threatening experience for me, my boss with his extraordinary analytical skills would always do too much of 'reading between the lines' and make my presentation 'Eureka' moments of his life. Soon I started

feeling like a bowler who would be hit back with sixes on every 'no ball' he delivered.

I remember, once my boss had asked me to prepare some presentation. In the meantime he had disappeared abroad to sign some foreign deals. The presentation was about some analysis as to why there was so much gap between demand and supply for our products which meant a loss of potential revenue for the company. I had recently joined. So I did exactly what I was asked to do without any wise omission of duties. I consulted all the concerned people in the planning, production departments at the factory, and also the sales team at our Mumbai office. On thorough discussions and analysis the presentation was made direct enough to demand immediate action on the old, defunct machines which were just adding to the dead investment and overheads. The only solution was to sell it off and replace it with the latest machines to boost the output so that we could catch up with the demand. It was a tradition of our typical small company to turn a blind eye to any suggestion which advocated upright spending. The word

efficiency here meant the ability to squeeze as much as possible out of the status quo, be it any means of production; land, labour, capital or enterprise. It took me three months to discover this reality of my company. When my boss returned, he first got rid of his backlog. After a couple of days he asked me to show my presentation. I threw all my energy into apprising him about my findings and the proposed action plan. I waited after I finished, holding my breath and expecting his appreciation for the efforts put in to arrive at these findings. It was only my second month in the corporate world; so I was still in the 'fool's paradise'.

Fresh MBA's blood was boiling when my boss finally began to speak, 'Good! Meghna, you have put forth a few valuable findings which will save our company a lot of money. If there are so many non-operative machines, we should downsize immediately. I think we are simply spending on idle labour. I will take care of it and do the needful at the earliest. I will speak to our MD and get the necessary changes done before we incur more wasteful expenditure.'

My boss acted on his words so quickly that soon I became a 'political hot potato' in the organization. Since then I had taken care not to apply much brains to any analysis. Also because it was not possible anymore to extract any reliable information from anybody as I had received a status of 'devil's advocate' without even striving for it.

Finally Saturday arrived. Everybody was in a Saturday mood; clad in jeans, ordering outside food and needless to mention, planning a movie in the evening. I was not going to accompany them for a change.

My team assembled for the great presentation session in the conference room. Today I just went into a 'switch off' mode soon after I finished giving the presentation as thoughts about meeting my 'think tank' were doing rounds in my head. My boss processed my presentation and mailed me his final output. He also mailed further tasks which were sufficient to keep me hooked to my seat till seven o'clock. He then went into conference room where all the directors and my boss would gather for lunch every day. He left soon after lunch.

It was two o'clock. My boss would leave at two o'clock every Saturday.

I had asked him once, 'Sir, as I work extra hours every day, can I also leave at one o'clock on Saturdays?' 'Meghna, as you know office hours for the company remain same for Saturdays just like other days. Only I have been granted the special permission to leave early on Saturdays as I have always worked with MNCs rendering me addicted to 'two weekly off' culture. But if we both are not around after two o'clock, it might hamper the company's work. So I want you to stay in the office just as my proxy so that nobody really pinpoints at our department for not conforming to the company's rules. Don't worry. I am trying to get new rules in place to make Saturdays off officially very soon,' he said with usual artificial smile on his face.

As he would use the words 'very soon' I would get the message loud and clear that it would never happen. Very soon I gave up on my wish to see Saturdays off in our company. It was 6 o'clock and I was still stuck with some stupid projections which my boss had asked me to

do as a result of some 'insightful extrapolation' of my presentation. That excel sheet seemed like a maze to me. At one end it was me, stranded and marooned at this crappy place and at the other end it was 'Bombay Blue', calling me to add some spice to my life. My eyes were searching for the shortest and surest route to lift and drop me at some fragrant table in the vibrant company of sizzlers, pasta and brownie.

'God, please send some virus in my system so that this whole thing disappears from my life and I get to run away from this place...at least by 7 o'clock...at least today,' I said to myself.

Yeah; God did send a virus. But not in my system; rather in my brain and I finished the projections, fancy enough to inspire one more Eureka moment in my boss's life.

Finally I shut down my laptop and packed everything. I went into the washroom to freshen up.

'Hey Meghna, you are coming with us for a movie, right?' asked my HR friend who was a permanent

faculty of the washroom. That was one more avenue for her to kill time in the office.

'Sorry, I can't make it this time as I have some other commitment' I replied.

'Hey, what's the matter? Seeing someone?' she said, giggling.

'Why these HR people get so much into their roles; they want to stalk you everywhere, into your personal life as well', I thought.

'No, just preparing for it,' I said and left the office.

It was seven thirty and I was supposed to reach Bombay Blue by eight. I had always maintained my record of not reaching on time, always putting the blame on the 'never sleeping' traffic of Mumbai. But this time I wanted to reach on time as I was the host of this dinner. By the time I reached there it was eight thirty. It was almost in my blood to screw things up. They all had reached the place before me. A gang of four; Alok, Rahul, Karan and Meenami! Everybody in my gang was such a character that I was sure if I heard their thoughts about marriage I would be prepared to judge any species on earth which

was an inevitable part of the arranged marriage process. I waved at them as soon as I got down from the auto. Nobody waved or smiled back. It was a gesture to convey the message to me, 'We are only interested in the food. So please get down at the 'negotiating' table at a gallop'.

We got in and settled at some isolated table in the corner to avoid previous embarrassing complaints by the hotel managers to keep our noise levels under control. First we decided to order and then start this 'simply marry' session.

'What would you like to have, ma'am?' the waiter asked.

'Water,' I said almost as a reflex. After cooling our mouths we ordered sizzlers, pasta and sizzling brownies. Then I invited them to express their ideas about arranged marriage.

'People, I have decided to get married' I said, excited.

'Why not; recession is the best time to get married! But you will need somebody to get married to, right?' said Rahul, mockingly.

‘Unfortunately I will have to find someone to get married to as we are still not into robot marriages. Also my parents have had enough of inter-caste marriages in family. I am not in a mood to pioneer inter-species marriages. On a serious note, guys, I am up for an arranged marriage,’ I said. ‘That’s the reason I have called you all here to discuss my questionnaire,’ I continued.

‘Questionnaire?’ was the chorus.

‘Yes, of course. I have prepared a few questions which I want to ask the candidates I happen to meet in the process. As I am new to this process I want you to help me as to how I should put forth these questions to the guys as diplomatically as possible,’ I said and paused to check out their reactions.

‘I don’t understand why you girls are always fond of making simple things complicated. We guys don’t expect anything from you girls let alone brains. Rather, the little the better! The fact that you are fully operational girls is more than enough for us. See, guys don’t like questions. They understand only real things;

your face and your other assets. In short, you are already in a pathetic position; now why do you want to make it look like an awfully lost match by asking stupid questions? Neither your attack is strong, nor your defense,' said Karan who was receiving nods from other three jury members.

'Karan, I think you are not aware of the fact that I am going to foot the bill today so that you guys contribute to this session fruitfully,' I said assuming that at least now it will bring the scattered cattle to the house. 'So what I was saying was I intend to ask a few questions to the guys. Of course, it will happen only after a couple of conversations when we both, I and the guy get comfortable with each other,' I continued looking at Karan who was now engrossed scanning through the menu card, putting his finger on the right side column of the menu card to pick up the most coveted dish at a gallop.

'My mistake,' I whispered to myself.

'So you mean to say that you will first buy the chewing gum, chew it for a while then make a balloon out of it

and the moment it reaches its peak you will pinch it, right?' said Alok, frowning.

'Well, my first question would be, 'are you a virgin?'' I said, ignoring Alok's comment.

'What crap?' again a chorus.

'See, you have already made your life so miserable by deciding to get married. Now why the hell do you want to make it even more difficult by asking such a question? Please get some life,' Alok said.

'What do you mean by that? I am still a virgin,' I said, aggressive.

'That's a different story. You don't have a choice!' said Rahul.

'Shut up! See, I am not particularly concerned about what the guy answers if I like him in the first place. It is just for my personal satisfaction,' I said.

'Sorry? Personal satisfaction? Then you would rather expect him to be a non-virgin!' said Alok and they all burst into laughter.

'You are impossible, guys. Cut the crap!' I said, losing my patience.

Sizzlers and pasta arrived. That was the only thing I found worth paying for in the situation.

'As this question per se is not going to change your decision if you like the guy in the first place, shall we move on to the next question?' asked Meenami.

It came almost naturally to Meenami to gavel the meeting to order. And she was the only one in the gang who could do that successfully.

'Size does matter,' I thought.

'Well, my next question would be, 'do you smoke?'' I said dropping the spoon in the plate without even having a bite.

'Tell me one thing, are you sure you want to get married?' said Karan.

'Now what's the problem with this question? There are guys who don't smoke. My jiju doesn't smoke,' I said.

'Even my uncle doesn't smoke for my aunt. He has quit smoking since he got married. Before marriage he used to smoke at home ; now he smokes only at public toilets as that is the only place where my aunt can't creep in,' said Rahul and went to the toilet.

Rest were busy gobbling up as many chicken pieces as possible.

‘As you can’t afford to be particularly concerned about what the guy answers, shall we move on to next question?’ said Meenami.

I looked at her. By now she had taken charge of pasta which was actually meant to be shared with me. No wonder, she was keeping me busy enough with questions.

‘Guys, I don’t want to consume any more of your precious time. So I would like to finish it with my last question, ‘do you drink?’” I said, hesitant.

‘Are you crazy? What’s wrong with you? Sweetheart, you are up for a marriage; that too an arranged marriage. Drinking is the only way which can make the guy unconscious enough to say ‘I love you’ to you and add some love spice to your otherwise ‘low TRPs’ story, at least once in a blue moon. Well, the more he drinks, the better it is to keep you guys going even after honeymoon,’ said Rahul who had recently achieved his ‘poet’ status owing to his regular drinking binges.

'Thanks a lot, guys! I don't know how I would ever survive without you!' I said in an overwhelmed voice.

'Any time, sweetheart,' said Karan who was struggling to save his Mexican dish from others.

By the time I finished talking and started concentrating on sizzlers it was too late. For the first time I felt bad for my poor timing. Pasta was already cleared off the table. No wonder, Meenami didn't ask me to move on to the next question now. Only dessert was yet to arrive.

'Rahul, what happened to your love story? Saumya must really be mad at you. You are taking so long to marry her? What's the matter, dude? You are serious with her, right?' I asked just to beguile my wait for brownie.

'Things are not smooth at home, honey,' said Rahul.

'What happened?' I asked, worried.

'You see, I have two elder sisters who are married now. In my community, girls are a big liability no matter how qualified they are. My parents have spent whopping amount of money on their marriages hoping to recoup it at the time of my marriage. So, now they are devastated to know that their son has turned out to be a dead

investment. Love marriage is still a taboo in my community. My parents are still in a denial mode. It seems, I and Saumya will have to fight it out for some more time,' he said signaling the waiter to get the brownie soon.

'Hey Karan, what happened to your plan of getting married?' asked Meenami who was relatively free now (of course only till brownie arrived).

'I have planned a 15 days Ladakh trip this year. Rest of the leave has already been consumed by me. So I can't manage it this year. I have to wait till next year,' Karan replied.

'But have you found any girl?' I asked.

'What is there to find? All girls are the same. I will pick the size suitable to my pocket,' he replied as if we were discussing about buying some fuel efficient vehicle. I looked at Meenami who seemed like a fuel guzzling SUV to me.

Finally brownie arrived. As soon as the waiter set it on the table I pounced on it only to burn my fingers. I had not even recovered from my injury and I got a call from

home. It was Ala, my sister. Since my parents shifted to Hubli, our native place, my sister became my new guardian. She got so much into that role that my life became like that of the citizen in some military-ruled country and my sister's place like a cantonment board.

'Where are you?' she asked with utmost rudeness.

'I am still at Bombay Blue. I will come by 10.30 or so,' I replied with utmost bravery.

'If you wish to see shelter above your head for one more night you better be back by 10,' she concluded and hung up.

I saw my watch. It was already 9.45.

'How can she be so cruel? How did she manage to fall in love? How does jiju manage to chitchat with this mean advocate whereas she opens her mouth only in the court? Probably love is dumb as well,' flurry of my thoughts was just mounting in my head as my mobile rang again.

'Did you leave?' Ala alias Hitler said.

'Yes,' I said and hung up.

'Love is blind, deaf and dumb,' I thought thinking about my poor doctor jiju who was talking little too much with his patients at the clinic these days.

I cleared the bill and I got up as if some current went through my body. I rushed home.

As my auto was about to leave, my friends screamed, 'For dating tips, meet us at 'Red Box' next weekend. Good night, babes!'

I reached home with 'zero' take home both monetarily and intellectually. That night before going to sleep, in addition to chanting 'Hanuman Chalisa', I vowed not to discuss anything about my marriage with my 'think tank' ever in my life. I was up for some sleep now. I hoped to hog some sizzlers and pasta in my dream at least.

Two

To begin my arranged marriage process, I was supposed to create an account on various matrimonial websites. I also had to prepare some flashy profile. I was getting very bored to do this all alone. So I decided to take somebody's help. My mind started running through the names of my well-wishers who would be happy to serve me. The list ended without any rows or columns. I was left with no other option but to do it myself which was not possible before next Sunday. I had to keep this task on the back burner for now. I got lost in the routine work at office. One day I was having lunch with my group; Kavya (HR manager), Bharti (directors' assistant) and Henna (accountant). I noticed something unusual in their behavior. They were all quiet and giving cold vibes to each other. They were not even exchanging their vegetables. I was feeling awkward as I didn't know how to react not having a clue as to what had happened. Moreover I wanted to share their vegetables which always seemed tastier than my vegetable. But today it

was difficult to do so as there was a 'climate change'. So I was badly affected by this cold war. Everybody got back to work immediately after lunch without taking 'post lunch' strolls outside which was one more shock to me. I decided to find out what was the matter as I did not want to forgo three alternative vegetables.

I got back to my work. After a while, I got a message on my laptop through an IP messenger from Kavya, our HR manager.

'As you all know, we are about to put the new rules in place to ensure that everybody adheres to company's timings strictly. It will be applicable from tomorrow and it will be implemented without any discrimination whatsoever. Thank you,' it read.

I immediately turned to Kavya to find out what she was up to.

'Hey, what are these new rules?' I said.

'Were you not in the office yesterday? Did you not read my mail yesterday?' she frowned.

'Boss had taken me to the Daman factory yesterday and since morning I am busy making the report. Will you

please forgive me for this and tell me what I don't know and the whole office knows,' I said desperately as being a female I could not stand the thought of 'information asymmetry'.

'Meghna, whoever comes later than ten o'clock will be marked as half day from tomorrow onwards. It will be waived only if you have any genuine or unexpected commitments on hand. But you will have to inform the HR department about it a day in advance,' she said with a sadistic smile.

'But how can you inform about emergencies a day in advance?' I said, irritated.

'Rules are rules, Meghna. But why are you bothering yourself so much as you are the only person who never comes late,' she said.

'Precisely and I don't want to lose my core competence at least in the wake of appraisal,' I murmured.

'Sorry?' she frowned.

'Nothing to you,' I said and returned to my seat.

I decided to discuss it with Bharti in the evening as we would both leave about the same time and would go to the station together.

Even before I could say anything Bharti started ranting, 'I tell you, Meghna, she is so cunning. She is really getting on my nerves with this new poppycock of hers. You are marked half day just because you are late by 5 minutes! And what about the late hours we sit everyday to clear the company's shit? Nobody even appreciates it, let alone rewarding it! She always leaves early. Even during office hours she hardly does any work. She just thrusts all the work on that poor assistant of hers. Still she gets more salary just for heating the seat up. I tell you, I am so damn fed up of this company! It is just because of this bloody recession that I am tolerating all this humbug?.'

'Yeah, I know, I agree with you completely. Even I find it all nonsense. But who will stop her as you know she is so self-styled,' I said, expressing my solidarity with her keeping in mind her tastiest tiffin and two extra snacks tiffins.

Next day Kavya came to me. She looked very sad.

‘What’s the matter? Are you okay?’ I asked her.

‘You know, Meghna , there is this conspiracy going on in the office to oust me. Since I introduced the new rules everybody is just behind me. Whenever I try to bring in some discipline, it just backfires. I really don’t know what to do. All these singles, good for nothing, have made my life miserable,’ she said, on the verge of breaking down.

‘Discipline is for donkeys,’ I remembered one of our MBA professors saying.

Well, I brought my mind back to Kavya. As it was very visible she hated all singles in the office who had no life beyond the office. They would sit back very late to impress their bosses. It would also give them some extra time to flirt with hot chicks in the office. They would never get tired of these late hours. It would make very awkward for my married HR friend to leave early.

She once said sadly to me, “See, it takes me two hours to reach home. Moreover I am married. I have other social

responsibilities. And even if I manage to stay back, what work will I do sitting so late?"

Even I didn't know what to answer as I had told her about all the recreational websites to kill her time and I was left with no other ideas for these late hours.

'Meghna, are you listening? I am talking to you,' Kavya yelled, bringing my wandering mind back to the topic.

'Yeah, of course,' I said, collecting myself.

Suddenly it struck my mind.

'Please calm down. Well, I have one idea to bail you out,' I said, hesitant.

'What is it?' she pounced on me.

'You add one more rule, nobody should stay back after the usual office hours; otherwise they will be fined. It should be portrayed to save on electricity, refreshment and other miscellaneous expenses on the account of late hours. Use words like cost cutting and all; it goes well with recession. People will automatically come to office on time in order to finish the work in stipulated timing. Also start acting very busy at work. Speak minimum with others. Try to credit the salary on time finishing the

paperwork early this time. That will spread a good word about you. In the meantime, go little easy on your new rules. Once people are led to believe that you are equally miserable and slogging it out just like them, it will give you a good halo effect. Then they will not object to your rules. People will get engrossed in bustle of routine life again. Soon you will go into oblivion,' I paused to see her reaction.

'Agreed, but what will I do to act busy?' she said.

'Get me married,' I mumbled.

'You said something?' she said, puzzled.

'I am planning to get married. And I want your help in this as I am very new to this arranged marriage process. I don't know how to go about searching for the best match on those matrimonial sites. I know you have recently found a good match for your sister-in-law on Bharatmatrimony.com. I really appreciate your love and affection for your sister-in-law,' I just spurted it out.

'Well, she hardly appreciates it,' she said, sulking.

'Anyway. I am happy that you have decided to get married. I am really excited about it. I will surely help you,' she said, gushing.

'Why not? You would have got all singles in the office married at once if they all came to you,' I thought.

'I will open your account on Kannada matrimonial sites today. I will prepare your profile and upload it soon,' she said, feeling proud.

Two days later, she asked me to become a paid member of Bharatmatrimony.com to begin with.

'Is there no other option than chipping in two thousand right away on the first day itself?' I frowned.

I convinced her to start with free membership for first three months. I thought that will give me some time to adjust to this new market and formulate my strategies on the basis of lessons learnt from my experiences in these three months. Then it would make sense to opt for paid membership.

'Why to play foolhardy with money?' I thought.

She prepared my profile. She put into it all HR knowledge she had acquired to make my profile

exceptionally outstanding. In her attempt to make it a star profile she described me as an Analyst whereas my designation was Management Trainee under COO of the company. I didn't bother much as in a small company, you are everything you wish and want to be. She just asked me to have a look at my profile.

'Just see if everything is right,' she said, opening my profile.

'Meghna Talwar, 26, MBA, working as an Analyst in Mumbai,' read first line.

'Ambitious, dynamic, humble, smart, talented, intelligent, active, caring, creative, loving, fun loving, nature loving, animal loving, bird loving,' read 'about me'.

'Don't you think there is too much loving of me in the profile?' I said.

'Of course, there is. It reflects on the strong humanitarian side of your persona,' she said.

'You have flattered me a little too much. My profile doesn't seem realistic. You have made me a jack of

almost all. Now which fancy word from the dictionary is left to describe me?' I asked, perplexed.

'Beautiful...I have not manipulated your beauty as it would obviously expose other lies at once. So we can't lie that blatantly,' she said blatantly.

'Good,' I said, trying to hide my anger.

'Meghna, you need to get a better snap of yours soon,' she said, preoccupied with my snap.

'Why? What's wrong with this snap?' I asked, almost irritated.

'See, I can't see the slightest trace of smile on your face in this snap. We need a smiling face to reflect on the sound and successful life. Looking at this snap, the guy can only feel that he is going to be your 'escape route', ' she said with a serious face.

'By the way I was trying to give myself an elegant look in this snap,' I whispered.

'huh?' she asked, looking at me.

'Nothing,' I said, retreating.

Rest was okay as she could not do much R & D with my family and educational background. She had given preferences for MBAs and software engineers.

'Listen, once your profile gets active on the portal you will start getting the interest requests. I will check it regularly and accept the suitable interest requests as per my discretion without consulting you as time is very precious in the arranged marriage process. There should not be any delay to make sure we don't miss out on good candidates. I will get you involved only when necessary,' she said.

I started imagining her hunting for smiling faces on all the matrimonial sites with her MP3 on and 'Lays' in her hand.

'Has she married any toothpaste ad model?' I wondered. For the next few days I saw very little of her in her seat which was next to me. She would sit in the conference room scanning through the interest requests I had received. Conference room was the perfect place for it as nobody would disturb her there as people would think that she was busy with some interviews. Soon she

received a renewed sense of respect for working really hard for the company. Yeah, she was working for the betterment of her company by trying to boost the employees' productivity by getting them married.

Bharti's volcanoes also got subdued as now the entire group would leave at about same time. So there was no scope for bitching now. My ears got relieved and my mouth got busy with all the three vegetables back on my dish. It was win-win for all.

'Mom, I have started looking for guys from our community on matrimonial sites; I mean on internet. My colleague is helping me with this process,' I said as mom was braiding my hair.

'Are you out of your mind? Why are you risking your life?' my mom stopped braiding my hair.

'Oh, is marriage that bad?' I asked.

'Shut up, not that. Why are you getting into online stuff? It is very dangerous. I have heard that guys marry after meeting the girls through chatting and then they just dump poor girls after marriage,' she said, exasperated.

'Oh mom, don't worry. Nothing of that sort will happen to me. We will be very cautious about the whole thing. And I have two jijus who will judge the guy perfectly. Relax, mom. It is the best and easiest way to reach out to our community guys who are very rare in Mumbai,' I said, calming her.

The mere thought of a 'Kannada guy' gave my mom an instant energy. Whenever I, mom, dad gather at my sister's place, my mom starts talking in Kannada not showing any mercy on my Maharashtriyen jiju. It goes on and on till she gets tired gossiping about my paternal relatives. It takes a little longer as she keeps repeating most of the stuff to dad who is by default honeymooning with All India Radio.

'Aunty, please don't speak in Kannada. It is not allowed at my place. You know that I don't understand it,' my jiju vents out.

'I don't need anybody's permission to speak in my mother tongue. Meghna, you marry Kannada guy only. I am tired of this repression of freedom of speech,' she grumbles.

So now she was happy about the fact that she was going to get one more listener for her Kannada discourse.

'Meghna, why are you so rigid about the location? We have so many good guys from Bangalore. You know, all our relatives can find the best guy for you there. No need of this risky online business,' she said.

'Mom, let me first see how it goes here. We will think about non-Mumbaikars later,' I said, cutting her off.

'Remember, it is the person that matters more and not the location. You know, I married your dad happily even if it meant relocating to Maharashtra. I didn't know anything about this place. But gradually I learnt everything including the language. If the person is right, rest of the things can be managed but it is not vice versa. So keep your options open,' she said and went to the kitchen.

Kindly note that this book is available for sale at all the leading bookstores across the country or you can buy it online from Flipkart.com or any other Indian fiction books selling website. Thank you.

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