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## A Judas

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A person whose job is to persuade people into buying a service or into giving their support often shows a lack of conscience and does not hesitate to act in a dishonest or immoral way in order to get what they want. It is not because they are fundamentally unscrupulous but because evasive and unpredictable people compel them to be.

It is ten o'clock in the morning. Employees in ones and twos enter the office, hurrying to a computer to sign in attendance. Then before getting on with their work they sit in groups to enjoy a brief humour.

Jayant goes straight to his desk and sits in his chair without joining any of the gossip groups. He is benign and courteous and therefore he is held in esteem by colleagues in the office. It is not in his nature to leave his chair before his work is done. No customer of whatever class and status goes back dissatisfied with his services because he never discriminates against anybody, nor does he delay dealing with them. He is always cheerful on account of the fact that he is scrupulously honest and always avoids doing anything that could cause him stress. He is helpful, supportive and generous and so he often obliges the customers even by providing those services which are not his assigned jobs. Since he exhibits a strong work ethic and unquestioning obedience, the manager often piles more work onto him. However, he expresses no resentment at doing some other people's work while they idle away the hours, talking and laughing.

A sales representative named Jagdish appears. He goes behind the desk, bends and touches the feet of Mr Jayant to show him respect. He then steps back and sits down on the chair opposite.

'I wonder,' he begins, 'what will happen to this office when you're transferred from here. Only a very few fill their posts satisfactorily. If you stop taking on a lot of additional work, the door of this office won't open the next day. In terms of knowledge and skill, nobody is half as adept as you are. Every salesperson treats you with great respect. They sometimes, as I've seen, argue even with the manager but no one has ever dared snub you.'

‘Oh no Jagadish, nobody is perfect,’ answers the clerk gravely. ‘There’re still a few who resent having to follow guidelines. But, you know, I always bite back a retort.’

‘However, I revere you as my elder brother and owe all my success to you. I think I don’t need to tell you that I could not have distinguished myself as a leading sales representative without your help and support, particularly when they hate me, envy me, discriminate against me and discourage me.’

‘But there’s still a lot for you to do. I want you to establish yourself among the top five performers in the regional merit.’

Here the agent finds a right time to remind the clerk of his application for an advance. ‘Your words will come true,’ he says, ‘but I need an office of my own, sir, as my clientele is growing day by day.’

‘Oh yes, your request for an advance of Rs 500000 has been granted. I received the approval letter from the regional office an hour ago. Now you’re required to provide us with a National Electronic Fund Transfer - Mandate Form completed by Sravasti Enterprises, along with necessary corroborative evidence, such as a certified copy of their passbook or a cancelled cheque and a certified copy of their PAN card, to support their bank account and PAN details on the form. We need these papers to make a payment to the firm for furniture and office equipment that you have to purchase from them and to avoid the money being sent to a wrong person.’

‘All credit goes to you, sir. I’d not have been able to get this interest free advance sanctioned had it not been for your support. I’m deeply indebted to you. But there’s still a problem – the owners of Sravasti Enterprises have made it clear that they won’t show anybody their passbook or give anybody a blank cheque, nor will they make their GST or PAN number public. They said it would be good if the payment were made by a cheque instead. When I insisted, they sent the details of their bank account and their pan number to my WhatsApp and said it was all they could do.’

‘But, you know,’ persists Jayant, ‘we have no alternative method. The relevant requirements must be complied with if you are to avail yourself of this advance.’

‘So I think, sir,’ temporises Jagdish.

‘No way! Go and come back with the form and the documents.’

‘If it is mandatory, I’ll go to see them again.’ So saying, Jagdish pushes the chair back and stands up. He goes round to touch the feet of Jayant and then he leaves the office.

Talking, joking and roars of laughter fill the air as soon as the office opens the next day. Jayant, as usual, shaking hands with his colleagues, makes for his chair with a happy smile on his face. An hour later Jagdish appears. As ever, he shows respect for Jayant and sits on the other side of the table. ‘I’ve always regarded you as my elder brother and never as an office clerk,’ he says. ‘Excuse me, but there’s something I must say here. This chair doesn’t suit you. Given your knowledge and skills, you deserve higher post and pay. Most of the bosses in this organization, so far as I can judge, look like pygmies compared with your dynamic personality. The irony is that idiots have control and authority over the intellects in our count...’

‘Oh Jagdish,’ breaks in Jayant, ‘it’s nothing but your love for me – someone is an officer because they qualified as officers. Anyway, where’s the NEFT Mandate Form?’

‘Leave it out, sir,’ says the agent, pretending that he is not much interested in taking out the advance. ‘I’d never coerce you into doing something against the rules.’

‘What do you mean, they refused to give the documents to you?’

‘They say they have sent the details to my whatsApp and that’s an end to the matter. Besides, they declined to talk to you as well.’

‘Are you sure the information about their bank account on your whatsApp is correct and true?’

‘One hundred percent, respected sir,’ replies Jagdish, looking at the clerk with an anxious expression on his face. ‘I have had the information verified once again.’

‘Jagdish is as truthful as he is ambitious,’ Jayant muses. ‘Furthermore, he belongs to my caste, so he’ll never betray me. If I don’t do him a favour, who else will? He’s the only person of our community here who is trying to gain his place among people of wealth and position. It’s my duty to support a brother.’

Then he looks at Jagdish. ‘Look, I trust you implicitly,’ he says. ‘If you’re sure that the payee’s bank account and IFSC code on your WhatsApp are correct, I’ll transfer the money to it. Go and bring me a printout.’

Jagdish stands up, pulling his mobile phone from his pocket. ‘Only someone very close to me will tend to my needs – that’s very kind of you, dear sir,’ he says, forcing himself to be too polite to him. Then he goes out, exploring WhatsApp.

After half an hour he comes back with the printout and hands it to the clerk, who feeds the information into the computer and asks the head of the department to validate the data entered by him.

‘NEFT Mandate Form and the attached documents are OK, Jayant ji?’ asks the head, opening the menu on the computer.

‘Yes, sir,’ replies the clerk, hiding the fact.

The officer thereupon validates the data and soon after that the clerk makes the payment.

After three days Jagdish comes to see Jayant. He shows him respect as before and sits at the desk without a word.

‘You must have picked up the office equipments from Sravasti Enterprises?’ says Jayant with a happy smile on his face.

‘No sir, they haven’t yet received the payment,’ replies Jagdish with a grave expression.

‘They have not received the payment?’ he shoots back in surprise. Then he does a search on the computer and adds, ‘The money transfer is successful – sure the payee is lying.’

‘But sir, they avow their account has not yet been credited with that amount.’

Jayant writes the transaction number down on a piece of paper. ‘Go to the bank and find out who the recipient is,’ he says, handing the slip of paper to Jagdish.

Jagdish gets to his feet and walks out. Jayant in a state of shock waits impatiently for him to get back. He grows more worried as the minutes go by. An hour passes before Jagdish returns. ‘The

money has been transferred to the account of Sarasvati Enterprises instead of Sravasti Enterprises, sir,' he informs the clerk.

'Hush,' whispers Jayant and takes him aside in order to talk to him in private. 'Perhaps you don't understand the consequences of your carelessness,' he continues. 'You know, the department will chargesheet me for making the payment without a valid NEFT Mandate. Besides, think of the officer who validated the NEFT data entry, trusting me blindly? There's no knowing how he'll react when his integrity is questioned. Now the only way we can hope to right the wrong is to go to Sarasvati Enterprises that has received the money. However, if they happen to behave dishonestly, we are not going to get the money back because we can't make a legitimate claim owing to the breach of fund transfer rules.'

The two go to Sarasvati Enterprises whose proprietor not only denies receiving the money but also insults them. Here the tone of Jagdish's language changes. 'Mr Jayant, listen very carefully to what I say,' he says harshly. 'The Department won't exempt me from monthly repayments on my advance. In addition, it'll also ask for the receipts for the items which I won't have purchased. I don't know what you can do or you cannot do – I must have my office equipments purchased or the advance soon paid off. I did not want to take out the advance, nor did I ever coerce you into making the payment before the mandatory NEFT requirements were met.'

Mr Jayant stands shocked. 'It's you, Jagdish!' he moans.

'Yes, it's me,' snaps Jagdish, 'and you'd better do something to compensate me for my loss without delay, or else I'll write to the manager, accusing you of misappropriation.'

Jayant finally takes out a bank loan and repays the advance. He feels so hurt that his face is set in a grim expression. He stops taking any notice of the agent, though he still continues to flatter him as he used to do.

A month later, Jagdish submits a big proposal from Sarasvati Enterprises with annual premium of five million rupees and is ranked in the top five salesmen in the Zone. When Jayant comes to know about it, he opens the desk drawer and takes out the WhatsApp printout that he received from the salesman. He is stunned to find that it was from Sarasvati Enterprises which he read as: 'Sravasti Enterprises' then.