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The Email

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“It’s a matter of basic courtesy,” said Shalini to her daughter.

“I’m done being courteous!” snapped Deepali, “Who has bothered to be courteous to me?”

“He has been courteous enough,” stated Shalini, “You should read his email, and give him a polite answer.”

Shalini looked at her daughter with pain in her heart. Deepali had always been a quiet, ‘good’ girl while growing up. But her life had been a game of snakes and ladders; in fact, more snakes than ladders. Right out of college, she had landed a job as a sub-editor at a fashion magazine; a job that her parents heartily disapproved of. Deepali edited and contributed articles on seasonal styles to the magazine; her parents felt that this was very shallow and did not do justice to Deepali’s capabilities. They wanted her to have a ‘respectable’ job, such as teaching, or a job at a ‘proper’ newspaper, which would suit Deepali’s intellectual abilities. Not only did Deepali disobey her parents, but she also fell in love with a colleague.

The colleague, Rakesh, was into sales and marketing, and soon charmed the 24 yearsold Deepali. He looked like a Greek God, with skin the color of butter, eyes like green marbles, and thick, wavy hair. Deepali was smitten. Despite all her education (she was more educated than him), she felt that, courtesy his appearance, he was too good for her. He was the charming, sprightly type of young man whom college girls adored. Deepali, a naïve girl who never had a boyfriend in her life...she wondered how could she be worthy of such a Prince Charming. And thus, she was thrilled when he proposed marriage during one of their evening sojourns at Marine Drive.

Shalini was lost in these memories when Deepali rudely interrupted her.

“What are you thinking of?” Deepali asked in an irritated manner.

Shalini’s reverie was broken, but only for a minute.

“I am going to my room,” Deepali announced, “I will see if I can open the email.”

A woman less strong than Shalini would have spent most of her time crying. She felt, and rightly so, that Deepali had been given a raw deal by life.

Who would have suspected that the charming Rakesh would be a drug addict and a pathological liar? He hung out with his drug-addict friends, and he lied to Deepali about everything. Then he began to disappear for days. He would not return home at nights. Needless to add, he lost his job. And could not sustain any new ones that he obtained. And then, came his entanglement with Sara, a married woman who lived in the next flat. Sara’s husband worked in Iran and Sara lived alone with her seven year-old daughter. At first, she invited both Rakesh and Deepali to her place for lunch. She was not very beautiful but a great

cook. Her daughter was very fond of Deepali. But soon, her calls and messages to Rakesh became more frequent, whereas she stopped interacting with Deepali altogether. Deepali had no time alone with Rakesh: there was always a call from Sara wanting help for some problem or another: filling up forms, repairs around the house, taking her grocery shopping. When Deepali protested, she was told that she was imagining things, and this soon led to bitter fights between her and Rakesh. Against her own nature, she began to check Rakesh's phone. Her husband was meticulous about deleting Sara's messages, but there were times he missed, and soon Deepali's suspicions were confirmed. Her pain was unbearable. She also found out that Rakesh took money from her, on the pretext of needing it for household items, and then spent some of it on Sara. Finally, after five years of marriage, Deepali walked out of her marital home.

It had been five years since, and Shalini had to witness her daughter's spirit totally broken. She missed Rakesh. She compared herself with her friends who were married and had children. Everybody else seemed to have their lives sorted out. Ronita lived in Delhi with her husband and two kids and had a plum job. Ria was a Director and happily married, too. These were her best friends and they were supposed to have enviable lives. They posted their photos on social media vacationing abroad with their spouses and children. Whereas she did not feel like going anywhere. She raged against her fate. She went to work and returned home late evening, then went straight to her bedroom and lay in bed till dinner time. Often she shed tears and cried at what she had lost.

Till recently, her job was going well. However, there had been a change in management and Deepali found herself at loggerheads with her new boss. Nothing she did would please the Dragon Lady. Then, Deepali came to know through common friends that Rakesh had remarried and had a new baby. Desperate to find some meaning to her existence, she began to apply for other jobs. She could not tolerate her boss, and she no longer wanted to be in the same place where she had met Rakesh. However, her effort to find another job – this time something that her parents would like – failed to bear fruit.

And then, a month back, her boss handed her a termination letter. Deepali lost what had been once her dream job.

The only ray of hope in her life was a new marital alliance, brought about by a sympathetic relative. His name was Sunil, and he worked as a senior manager at a multi-national company. Sunil was handsome and refined, and he came from a 'cultured' family which was into books and music. During their first date, he complimented her on her 'resplendent' eyes and gave her a bouquet of red roses. On that first day, Deepali went home with a song in her heart. And then more meetings followed, which made Deepali hope for married life again. She envisioned how she would post photographs of herself with Sunil on social media post marriage.

Soon Sunil and Deepali grew closer. They watched movies together holding hands. One day, at Regal theatre, while watching a movie, Sunil bent over and whispered "I love you" in her ears. Deepali felt that Life was good again, and that her happiness lay with Sunil. She did not mind the loss of her job so much.

However, there was something that needed to be tackled: letting Sunil know about the loss of her job. When the alliance was first made, she had been still working. Finally, she lost no time in telling Sunil the truth. He did not react at all, but behaved in his usual loving manner. Deepali went home happy and reassured.

However, the next time she called Sunil, he did not answer her phone. She did not think too much of it, as he sometimes did not answer her calls at office. It was only when two days passed that she panicked, and realized that a change had taken place. Sunil, suddenly and inexplicably, disappeared. His calls and messages stopped, and he never answered her call again. Deepali was perplexed and anxious. Swallowing her pride, she asked Shalini to contact Sunil's family.

Sunil's father sounded nonchalant over the phone. "Madam, our son does not want to proceed because his ideas and background does not match with that of your daughter. I will ask him to send an email. Please ask your daughter to check her inbox in half an hour.

Deepali went to her room and lay her head on her desk. She had no job and no life partner. Well into her thirties, failure has become a close friend. She felt she had nothing to live for.

Suddenly, she made a decision. She would not like to go on living like this. She would sneak into her room at night, and steal his bottle of sleeping pills. She would be finally free.

But first things first. Her mother insisted on her replying to Sunil's email and wishing him the best for the future. Well, if she was going to die anyway, what possible harm can it do to leave a good impression behind? Perhaps he would regret his decision afterwards.

Deepali switched on her laptop and with a sunken heart, went to her inbox. She easily located Sunil's email – it was the second email in her inbox. She was about to open the email when her attention was diverted...by the first email on the list. It was from the HR of a newspaper where she had applied for the post of an editor.

On an impulse, she opened the email from the HR first. By the time she finished reading, tears had started in her eyes. Without any further thoughts, she went back to her inbox. It took her less than a second to delete Sunil's mail, unread.

Half an hour later, Shalini came into the room and saw Deepali rummaging through her papers.

"What's the matter?" Shalini asked.

"I've an important interview tomorrow," Deepali replied, "By the way, I'm borrowing your blue sari."