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ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Living on an Impulsive Moment

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Suhana refilled the sugar jar with the last portion of the plastic bag. There were still many weeks before she could venture out to the grocery market to get the monthly stocks. *Everything needed a refill or replacement but how she thought.*

Their business was running at a loss. Her car sold, jewellery mortgaged, and the first floor was rented out. *At least their house was free from any sort liability* sighed Suhana. It was a result of their initial success and Suhana's proud possession in the heart of South Delhi. *But if the present situation continued, they would have to give it up and return to Gautam Nagar* She cringed at the thought of it.

"*Bahu*, make me some tea," said *Maji* entering the kitchen.

"Sure *Maji!*" she said pretending to be busy.

*Maji's* keen eyes, perspicacity, and semi-filled sugar jar enabled her to grasp the situation, and she patted Suhana's back gently.

"Don't worry, *Beta!* My pension is due soon. You can get the necessary kitchen stuff for the time being."

"How is it possible, *Maji?!?*" Suhana flared. "Your pension is hardly enough for your medicines!"

*Maji* withdrew her hand meekly, helplessness accentuating her wrinkled face to even deeper lines.

"Sorry *Maji!* I meant at least you don't ask money from us for your medicines." She said repenting her misbehaviour. Suhana regretted her impulsive behaviour always. It was a flaw that everyone pointed out. She was so fortunate to have a mother-in-law like *Maji* unlike typical Indian widowed mothers-in-law: possessive and determined to ruin their son's conjugal life.

“*Maji* please talk to Ahsan. He will understand you. All parents educate their daughters to fight the situation if need be. I am a qualified MBA and was already working before marriage.”

“I know it, *Beta*! But you already know that no daughter-in-law has ever worked in our family. Ahsan will never accept. The safest place for any woman is in her home. You don't know what people think of women who work and then there are incidences...”

“*Maji*, for God's sake we are in the 21st century! In a metropolitan city like Delhi, it is no big deal for a woman to work. And incidences can happen anywhere, even at home. Traditions can be upheld, and customs can be honoured only when there is enough food in the gut. It's a need of the situation not my ambition and what happens to me depends upon my conduct. I am thirty-one years old, an honourable woman and a mother of two girls. I can take care of myself...” pausing in between she flung her arms around *Maji* and continued. “He will accept *Ma*! He is just scared of you! These days when I bring up the topic, he listens in silence. Silence is half acceptance. Once the situation changes, I will resign.”

“*Suhana*!” Ahsan screamed from the hallway entering the front door. “Get me something to eat! I am dying of hunger. No time for lunch!” His voice emerged from the door, glided across the hallway and died with a loud thud of the bathroom door in the bedroom.

“See *Ma*, how hard he is working for us! Dark circles, grey hair no time for lunch! Does he deserve this? And look at me, staying at home all day!”

Convincing any mother is easy by shifting her focus to her son's sorry state. Given a choice, a mother would always choose her son's comfort over daughter in law.

“You are right! At the age of thirty-three, he looks fifty. I will talk to him tonight.” said *Maji* sipping her tea.

They had a lengthy discussion at the dinner table. While *Maji* and *Suhana* took turns in giving their arguments, Ahsan sat pondering over their justifications and nibbling his food.

“Ahsan, say something *Beta*! *Maji* said. “It is the demand of the situation. *Suhana* is no longer a child. She will be cautious.”

His words: “What will she wear to office?” finally ended the discussion with victorious smiles and relieved looks.

“There's a vacancy in *Neha*'s company. She said she would help me if I want.” Overjoyed *Suhana* declared and jumped to call *Neha*.

*Neha* was an intimate friend upon whom *Suhana* always counted upon, and she did stand up to her expectations managing an interview with her boss for *Suhana*. With her past work

experience, the presence of mind and intelligence, Neha was doubtless that Suhana stood a fair chance of being selected. However, there were some details that she needed to share with Suhana about her boss who was a no-nonsense person. Suhana required equipping herself well before the interview to deal with his stiff mannerisms and conventionality.

Dressed in a full-length formal suit, Suhana arrived on time on the day of the interview. Neha quickly conducted her to the meeting room on the second floor where the interview was to be held. Hastening through the passage, Suhana absorbed austerity and business-like atmosphere at work. Everything was immaculate, well organized and formally dressed smart people paced about engaged in serious talks. She realized how much she missed this environment and how the situations in her life brought her so close to her passion for being a professional. Now there would be no more killing yourself endlessly in kitchen without a word of appreciation! Here, at least if she clicked, there would be recognition...that is if she could make through the interview. Her reveries ended when she found herself waiting at the meeting room's door.

"Remember what I told you! Don't let me down in front of my boss! Now get in!" Neha said giving Suhana a gentle push.

Suhana cleared her throat and gave a gentle knock at the door responded by a man's friendly voice "Please, come in!" Her heart was thumping loud as she entered the room and spotted three suit-clad men seated at a huge round black glass table with just two of them smiling at her. The third one, resolute and keen, just gave a nod. From Neha's description, Suhana understood that he was the dreaded Mr Ryan.

Mr Ryan was tall, fair, handsome gentleman, who could very readily be passed for a British snob. He had thin pointed nose, a pair of grey emotionlessly solemn eyes, a perfect pair of pink lips that never seemed to crack in a smile. To all this, a day's unshaven look rendered a unique charm that was both elegant and ruthless at the same time. Angular jaws, high cheekbones, and silken brown hair with golden highlights - he had an exquisiteness of a Greek god. *What a pity that such breath taking handsome features were not bestowed the vibrancy and warmth of life she thought.*

Suhana felt that he was cold, distant and indifferent. Throughout her interview, she found herself uncomfortable only with this particular gentleman who seemed to disapprove her without uttering a single word. At times, he would ask a factual question that would startle her, and she felt stupid fumbling for an adequate reply to appease him. Sometimes a crease would appear between his brows trying to delve deep into her replies. At those times, she would experience adrenaline rush: her breathing became heavy, and throat went dry. With every question he asked, he appeared to be so intelligent, technical and factual and though she answered them all, she couldn't furnish it with confidence. She left the room feeling dejected, not wanting to think about it anymore. However, later that evening, Neha called and congratulated her for an excellent performance. Suhana was overjoyed with the news but *facing that cold, daunting desi-firangi was a force to reckon she thought.*

In the months to come, Suhana got accustomed to the new challenges life had thrown at her. At home, things were under significant control: bills cleared, salaries distributed, pantry filled, and school fees paid off. Ahsan could devote more time to his sluggish business, tension free! At work, Suhana made new friends, learned to organize her work, caught pace with the latest updates and struggled to follow stringent rules of the office. The boss would appear between meetings or during random checks. While everything else felt acceptable, only those times when she had to present reports before the board was exhausting as Mr Ryan's demand for perfection to abnormal heights resented her. But thankfully, such events were less than frequent, and she was learning from her experiences.

Back home, Ahsan gruded Suhana's work. It pained him to see her work so hard. He often blamed himself for it. He also missed her attention. She had so many things on her mind now unlike past. After work, there were kids, then Maji, then servants and then when it was his turn, she dozed off trading upon a promising tomorrow or weekend. But he loved her and was proud that she did break the age-old conventions and shouldered the household responsibility with him. She was talented, qualified, intelligent and yes...beautiful.

Eight months passed smoothly and then approached the appointed date for the party that everyone so anxiously awaited. Every year at Mr Ryan's birthday, Mrs and Mr Ryan threw a party where some of the top-notch members of the society arrived. It was a momentous occasion, and Mr. Ryan invited some selected people from his office members. Although the numbers from the workplace were limited, everyone got a chance to join the party once.

The discussions had already begun about what to wear, what not to and what was trending. People feared Mr Ryan when it came to work, but they loved him as a human being for his honesty, hard work, dedication and fair decisions. He never met a woman alone in his room. He was very faithful to his wife and respected everyone irrespective of their status. They admired him and therefore looked forward to attending his grand bungalow in the suburbs of the city so richly furnished.

Everyone was pleasantly surprised to see Suhana's name on the invitation list this time, but one person who was in disbelief was Suhana herself! Her first instinct was to turn it down, but the temptation to be a part of the grand experience discussed on a daily basis was too much too curb.

Finally, the day of the party arrived. The office staff reached together by a special minibus arranged as a complimentary service by Mr. Ryan. Although Suhana had been to several parties by very affluent people, this party was indeed different. From an intimidating mansion to jaw-dropping décor, from an elite crowd to mesmerizing music everything was magnificent. It was planned outdoor in the garden owing to the pleasant weather before the onset of winter, but people were scattered throughout the lawn, around swimming pool and on the ground floor of the bungalow.

Suhana had the chance to meet Mrs. Ryan for the first time. Dressed in a shimmery silver gown, Mrs. Ryan was a dusky woman with short curly hair. Someone said she was a model of yesteryears. Now in her late thirties, she still looked charming. They were a childless couple, but that didn't seem to affect them so much. Although Mrs. Ryan welcomed her guests warmly, she mostly kept to her close-knit circle, and the job of serving and looking after the guests were left to the caterers hired for the evening. Music, food, drink, perfumes, laughter, and discussion everything smothered the atmosphere making Suhana dizzy. She missed her kids and the warmth of her home.

She hugged herself as it was beginning to get late and cold. Bored and uncomfortable she decided to have orange juice and picked a glass from a passing waiter. It was still an hour before Ahsan would pick her up. After a few sips of the glass, she started feeling better, lighter and happier. She looked at the glass wondering if it was a magical potion when someone bumped into her and the juice spilled all over her elegant attire.

“So sorry Madam!” said the waiter trembling at his terrible mistake. Suhana brushed the liquid off herself trying to conceal her irritation and be civil. Mrs. Ryan appeared from nowhere and showed Suhana the way to the bathroom inside the house giving her directions to go on the top floor as there she would be alone.

Suhana rushed to the top floor following the directions. The sounds of the party hushed into a distant noise as she climbed the elegant stairway curving to the top. She was stunned by the beauty of the large living room in front of her. Her feet sank into the softest of carpets. It was silent, dimly lit with the warm glow of incandescent lamps at corners. Several plants of various sizes, brilliant tapestries, and plush designer furniture enamoured her. She just felt like lying down on a massive sofa before her and immerse herself in the ambience for a while.

“Excuse me?!” said someone seated at a corner she had not noticed.

Suhana turned to the voice taken aback by the discovery of Mr Ryan's presence who apparently had been watching her all this while.

“Sorry Sir, I just need to use restroom,” her voice wobbled.

He showed her way to an adjoining bathroom, and she just wished she could disappear from the bathroom itself. She unlocked the door to escape downstairs when somebody just pulled her into a corner and thrust her against the wall behind an oversized palm. Before she realized what was happening, she found herself trapped between the wall and the arms of Mr. Ryan. Dumbfounded, she stood there agape. He wasn't touching her now but was close enough for her to feel his breath. The golden light set his pale skin aglow, and the usual grim stare of his grey eyes melted to a dreamy romantic gaze giving them a brilliant hue. The smell of musk in his cologne mixed with nicotine and faint alcohol filled her lungs. He was drunk but still

appeared to be in lot more senses than her after the intoxication she felt by just looking at him.

Gradually, drawing closer, he muttered, “Oh Suhana! You have floored me beyond my wits!” and planted a soft kiss on her lips. She stood there stricken, expecting and even anticipating it but contrarily enjoying every bit of the moment. How much she loathed him all these days yet how much she was attracted from day one. How handsome he looked, how practical he was his knowledge, his decency everything had registered in her subconscious. The moment: dark, mystical and delectable, superseded prudence. Truth had dawned on her just at this moment.

A loud ringtone shook them to senses. It was Ahsan waiting downstairs. She freed herself and fled downstairs hurrying to escape from the situation. Throughout the way in the car, she was silent while Ahsan kept chattering about mundane business affairs. There were occasional calls he had to answer in between for which she felt grateful. The smell of Mr. Ryan’s closeness, the warmth of his skin on her, the aura of the whole place lingered into her consciousness. She was too lost to make any sense out of it.

It was late and everybody was asleep at home. She rushed to the bathroom, locked the door and leaned against it. Staring at her reflection in the large mirror, she recalled that she had chosen a saffron-colour silk sari with green border to look different from everybody else. Hair tied up in a big messy French knot along with carefree bangs left loose around her pink cheeks. Her eyes weren’t big, but they had the most beautiful shape and smoky expressiveness to which she applied make up artistically. She stood tall and observed her figure. After giving birth to two children, she was still in shape. Although not lean like Mrs. Ryan, she possessed the buxom beauty of womanhood. She glared at her bare midriff where the green border of her sari tucked in. The gold of the border reflecting on the skin of her waist gave it a beautiful sheen. She stroked it as it was here that he had touched. She felt distinguished for being singled out by the man who refused to look at any other woman other than his wife. She relished the triumph.

Next two days were holidays. Suhana was at home. A dull pounding headache and self-reproach tortured her. Reclusive and pensive she hated every inch of herself. Her conscience rebuked her. She had sinned, breached the trust of people who went against their wishes and let her to go out and work. She felt too fickle to allow it to happen to her. She was a married woman and a mother. It was a shameful act on her part. She wanted to resign and never face him again. What would *Maji* think? She trespassed the limits set by society. How would Ahsan react if he was to know? She felt a traitor and begged forgiveness from God.

Amidst all this, she couldn’t understand the way her body behaved. It felt warm all the time. She felt sensitive, and a strange longing crushed her feminine frame. It compelled the fulfilment of an unusual desire. She gave Ahsan the best moments of his life to suppress it. But every time, it returned with double the force. Nonetheless, she resolved to practice restraint in future and stand true to her commitments.

The next week passed as usual. Mr. Ryan was mostly away due to his out-stationed meetings or work-related excursions. They hardly saw each other, even if they did, it was amidst people, and he pretended as if nothing had happened. Suhana dismissed her thoughts rendering it an invalid act of a momentary slip on his part chiefly impelled by alcohol. She tried to concentrate on her job and let everything obliterate to past.

One evening, safe in the knowledge that he isn't there, she went to his office to leave a vital report at his desk for the next morning's priority task. It was late, and most of the staff had left. She carefully placed it so that it would catch his attention the first thing in the morning and turned to leave. Just then Mr Ryan entered the office busy on his phone. He paused to see her and signalled to wait. Her heart leaped a beat, but she had no other choice but to wait for his phone conversation to end. She observed his profile and all the memories of that evening rushed back revoking her resolutions. She lowered her eyes for the fear of revealing anything. Finally, the conversation ended, and he discreetly shut the door.

"Look Suhana, I am sorry for that evening." he said. "I was drunk. Please don't take me wrong."

Suhana was quiet. Her eyes still lowered, she was thinking of an appropriate reply when he continued.

"I should not have been so blunt but..." he paused and took her hands into his, "I couldn't resist! You looked so mesmerizing and sultry, so different from the rest of the crowd. I always admired your intellect, your attention to details and sense of humour. But that day, you completely swept me off my feet. Will u..." his voice getting passionate and deeper, "...be mine for this moment, for once!" he said tightening his grip.

"Hold me!" she whispered putting an end to the turmoil within her succumbing to her desire ultimately. Her steadfastness collapsed like a fragile house of cards as she made way for her lust to take control of her. She needed to vent it out.

For an hour, what pursued was silence and mere animal passion. They devoured each other with a sense of immediacy as if it was their first and last chance. Her youth unravelled. *Maji was right* she thought. *She wasn't a child anymore.*

That night Mr. Ryan couldn't get any sleep. The experience lit his soul, and a faint smile lingered. He just couldn't stop thinking about her. He couldn't wait for another opportunity to take her in his arms, but fate had something else in the store.

Next morning when he arrived, a carefully sealed envelope awaited him. Fearing its content, Mr. Ryan opened to read a resignation letter from Suhana. The language was dry and formal. She even skipped mentioning '*Dear*' next to his name. At least that would give him some solace. She was leaving for their hometown miles away to start a new life.



Nine months later, Suhana delivered a baby boy. Celebrations were in the air. *Maji* and Ahsan distributed sweets to the entire hospital staff. They were blessed with a baby boy who was a big wish come true. These nine months had been vexing for Suhana, the guilt and punishment, all of it she bore in silence. She had been impulsive always, but this time she doctored silence. Life had changed in many ways after that one mistake when she got carried away.

The door opened and excited Ahsan leaped to have a look at his sleeping son.

“Suhana, I have invited all the guests from the list for our party next month. But there is someone I invited without asking you.”

Suhana looked at him confused waiting for him to continue as she was confident that she hadn't forgotten anyone in the list.

Ahsan continued, “Remember Mr Ryan, your ex-boss?” Suhana went cold at the mere mention of his name.

“What?! Why do you have to call my colleagues? I am no longer in touch with any of them. “

“But I am.” He interrupted. “Only with him!”

“But why?!” she asked trying to sound as casual she could.

“Okay, I think I must not hide it from you any longer although I'm breaking a promise given to my most revered friend...”

Suhana took a deep breath to gulp what was following.

“Around five months ago, I happened to call Mr Ryan by mistake while searching for some other contact. I realized my mistake when he recognized me instantly and asked about us. I spoke to him for a couple of minutes. He asked me about our life here, my new business and you. I informed him about your pregnancy, and he was pleasantly surprised...I admit I told him that business wasn't doing well due to lack of proper investment. He liked my ideas and showed interest in investing and becoming a partner. However, he insisted I don't share it with you as you may not approve. He invested a huge amount, and that's the reason we are much better off today. Although he is our partner, he never interferes in my affairs and refuses to accept any share too. He wants me to open a savings account and deposit his entire share in our son's name. What a great guy he is! So I'm sure, you won't stop me from inviting our great new business partner to the party.”

Suhana was shocked beyond senses at the revelation. So he knew all the while about her and the baby. He didn't invest in Ahsan's business. He was too shrewd a businessman to show

interest in somebody's failed attempts to succeed at a small scale business at least without a proper analysis of the prospective market. He had invested in his son. Suhana couldn't keep Ahsan in the dark any further. He should know the real intention of his so-called great friend. He would even snatch away their son if he wanted. *Ahsan must be warned*. Furthermore, she couldn't take the guilt anymore. Imagining all sorts of negative consequences about the baby she decided that she must confront Ahsan. She had confidence in their love, and he would forgive over a period. She had been a great wife. He always mentioned it to her and everyone around.

“Ahsan I must talk to you. Listen...”

Three days later...

Mr. Ryan sat at his breakfast table to grab a toast and hurry to a meeting. He ate quickly checking his phone for the upcoming agenda. Mrs. Ryan still enjoying her morning coffee sighed and threw the newspaper away.

“Stupid chauvinistic middle-class men!” she said.

“What happened?” Mr. Ryan replied not paying much attention to the gory details that always caught Mrs. Ryan's attention.

“A man in some godforsaken town called Gautam Nagar killed his wife in the maternity room of a hospital. He choked her to death suspecting that their newly born child was a result of an extra-marital affair. Crazy guy! The DNA results proved that it was no one's but *his* child! But still he says he doesn't regret!” Leaving the newspaper in front of him, she kissed his cheek and left to get a shower.

With trembling hands, Mr. Ryan pulled the paper and searched for the news. A picture of wrapped dead body of a female lay on the floor. Two girls sat mourning with an old lady next to the shroud. Police cars and ambulance were visible in the background, and a defiant Ahsan stood cuffed staring at the dead body. To his shock, he read Suhana's and Ahsan's name. The paper dropped from his hands. *So she told him* he discerned. “Suhana...*why?*!” his heart ached.

This time, and for the first time, he regretted bribing the waiter that evening at the party. This time he regretted living on that impulsive moment!