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## **A Friend or a Freak**

**Dr. Archana Singh**  
Assistant Professor  
Rajkiya Engineering College  
Banda, Uttar Pradesh

“I am on forced medical leave...

I don't want to see him because his over-possessiveness is impairing my mental state”.

I was appointed as an Assistant Professor in a government organization. I was staying away from my family. Staying alone does not mean that I shall give up in front of wrongdoers. God has drawn a lot of challenging lines in my hand... I have been given the posting almost 600 kilometers away from my home, away from my only son. Above all, in the typical male-dominated office and chauvinistic environment.

The start of my new journey in a government organization with new faces, different work culture, and so-called caring people was not very fascinating. Everything in the office seemed to be peripherally normal, but there was an absence of coequality. After two months I started sensing the wrong vibes from some people especially my Head of the Department (HoD). He was a middle-aged man, short height, and almost bald head with a bald mind. He used to pretend as an intensive caring and helping man. It seemed as if he was my inborn enemy. I still remember his favorite line for me, “You visit your home, I will manage here and you put your signature in the register after returning... write an application and I will tear it once you return....it means no official record of leave” but later I came to know that he used to go to his home without taking leave and put his signature in the register. Such a lovely enemy I got...

Our head-on collision was first reported in February that too on 14 February. He came into my cabin after office hours and started shouting, by chance my two colleagues were there with me in my cabin. The matter was reported to the Director and a committee was formed to investigate the case. The investigation seemed to be biased but my colleague (male) who was present at the time of the incident in my cabin gave his honest statement. The committee members, especially women, took me in a room and tried to make me understand that these things happen in every organization and you should take your steps back. My father used to tell me, “Don't bow in front of wrong.” I didn't look back and asked the ladies to proceed with

my case. I mentioned a male colleague in the above lines just to reiterate that all men are not mean and cheap like others I have in my department. Even after three years the case was pending as I didn't receive any letter from the committee except the information that the committee recommended the director to issue a warning letter to my HoD for his wrong behaviour.

This love of my enemy did not end up here only. His blocked and pig head started plotting different levels of problems for me. During that chaos, almost one and half years back I met a social worker, Vishal, who helped me in resolving some of my office problems. Soon we started chatting, sharing, and caring. He used to share his childhood days and his medical conditions. He seemed to be a simple and nation lover who was always ready to help the needy. Time passes but through some of the incidences and his confession, I came to know that he is an alcoholic and chain smoker. I was emotionally attached to him as I wanted him to give up drinking and smoking. I had always seen the good side of him but now I can sense a negative side of his mind. Many a time I stopped talking with him and blocked his number but resumed talking to him as he used to play with my mind and was in continuous touch with me. One day he himself told me that he seriously needs to meet a psychiatrist, he felt that he was having a dual personality and again at this point of time I felt I should be with him. Often he showered a lot of kindness and motivated me, "You are a strong lady and knows how to manage family and professional life."

In the midst of understanding Vishal's mind and his problem, I landed up in another problem plotted by HoD. HoD was taken back by my complaint and now he was back with his arms and ammunition. He was back with his wicked team. The team comprised of people who were unfairly benefitted by HoD and the director. Vishal assured me, "if you are right, go ahead." and in fact he tried to help me in the best possible way he could.

I took a very strong decision to legally fight with the wrongdoers and filed a complaint in Mahila Aayog to get justice. On the other hand, Vishal's socio-political career was wambling due to his extremist behaviour and alcoholic habit. I took a leave from the office to rejuvenate my mind and tried to find solace at my home. My family knew about Vishal but I had not informed them about his extremist behaviour. To provide me moral support and a cool environment, this time I came with my family. We were happily living but then Vishal came to stay with us. He told me that he would help me in fighting for justice. It was almost 12 days since he stayed with us and thought of going to Prayagraj to meet his friends. We went to drop

him at Prayagraj but after three days he again came back to meet me. Instead of focussing on my office work, I was trying to understand this maniac.

Vishal used to tell me he respects women, “Nari pujniya hai, mei har nari ka samman krta hoon.” In public, he was polite with everyone and over-polite with ladies, but this time he was shouting at me even if I was opening my mouth. I came to know that he was a distant relative of my HoD and HoD went to meet him at his house. I was confused whether the change in Vishal’s behavior is due to his budding relationship with HoD or something else.

Suddenly my husband had to leave for his office work; my son and I were alone at home. For the first time, we both were having a strange feeling in the presence of Vishal. He started consuming alcohol before coming for dinner and used to stay the whole night ...shouting at my son, “sleep otherwise I will break your laptop...I will kidnap you if you don’t listen to me.”

He did not allow him to call my husband and asked him to show him his phone. He checked his call details. We became captive in our own house. Those two days were like a nightmare that we had not dreamt of. It seemed there was no blood in our veins because we both were speechless and were trying to console each other through the corners of our eyes. Vishal was behaving as if it was his own house and we both had to make him feel good. Such a strange and unexpected behavior...my health started deteriorating due to sleepless nights and office pressure. I called up my husband and requested him to come early, “try to come early, we are not well.”

The next morning (the third day) Vishal got calls from his friends and family members asking him to come back as his mother was admitted to a hospital last night. I enquired him, “you did not receive calls in the night.” He said, “My phone was in a silent mode.” There were 10-15 calls on his number. He said he had to leave for his home.

Yes, of course! you should! your mother wants to meet you ...you were out for so many days, she must have over thought about your absence and above all, she is your mother,” I tried to console him.

With a trembling heart I requested him, “you please do not come as she must be thinking wrong about our relationship...not only she but everyone.”

No, dear, it is not so, Vishal replied in a very low voice.

Finally, he left for his home, and I came to know that he did not meet his mother. The other day again he started calling me to book a guest house for him, which I denied as my husband did not come back. Vishal tried to pressurized me, I could sense that he was not in his senses... the next day he informed my husband that he was on his way to my organization. I had not overcome that two days trauma and was not prepared to welcome his strange nuisance... We left for our hometown to avoid him but that maniac shouted and abused everyone including me at the gate of my organization. When he came to his senses he realized what he had done ...he apologized for his doings ...still apologizing BUT he has lost me forever... he was good for me, I was clueless about what made him do so. His over-possessiveness was impairing my mental health.

Was this a conspiracy to low down my confidence to not fight for my rights? Was this a step to make me mentally unstable? I am still on leave to normalize and energize myself to get back to my work.

How a single person that too a female can fight against these academic goons? Justice can be delayed but cannot be denied. I still have strong faith that I can prove how spineless academic managers are plaguing our society. No matter how strong they are, but I will continue to fight my case on my own.