

Price Tag
on
Love

By
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Shuruwat

There was a ray of light hitting my eyes, disturbing me in sleep. I opened my eyes to see the light of the rising sun trying to penetrate the room, between the window covers. It looked beautiful, but irritating, as I wanted to have a nap more, before I got up. 'Harika,' I shouted, she is my wife. 'Please close the window covers,' I continued.

'You are late for your work, get up and get going,' she replied, in a sweet voice of hers.

'Few minutes more,' I said, turning my face the other side, pulling my blanket up to cover my face. I closed my eyes to sleep, but I heard the sound, 'Please don't do this; you are doing the wrong thing.' I woke up to realise that it was just my brain, which was revising those words from the previous day.

I got up and went close to my wife. She was making a breakfast for me in the kitchen, wearing a blue sari, hair still wet, rolled and tied with towel, at the top of her head. She was 42, but still the hottest. She had everything in correct place where it should belong. I was lucky to have her in my life. I could not resist myself from being away from her. So, I tried to grab her from behind before she realised it and stopped me by keeping her hand on my face and trying to push me behind. 'Take bath before touching me, I have to perform prayers.'

I gave her the saddest possible look, trying to convince her and naughtily said, 'God would be happy if you keep me happy.'

'I will pray to god, to keep you happy.'

'Pati hi to parmashwar hai, so, keep the GOD (me) happy.' I tried to hold her again.

She pushing me behind, harder this time, said, 'Booddhe ho gaye lekin bachpana nahi gaya,' turned back and continued with her work.

I was having my shower and the previous day's activity again flashed in front of my eyes, the young kid crying for justice. I wanted to forget it as soon as I could. I started singing songs so that I could divert my mind. I dressed up and joined my wife at the dining table, where she was waiting with the mouth-watering breakfast she had made for me.

I was very disturbed with the previous day's incident. I never spoke about my work at my home and my wife respected that. We finished our breakfast, before leaving for work. I dropped my wife close to her office and left to court. I was entering the court and the gatekeeper saluted me. I responded to him, parked my car inside the parking area, took my files and started walking towards my room. Rajesh, my colleague passing through my cabin, said, 'So advocate sahab, firse ek win.' I could have been very happy with his words, any usual day, but today, I was feeling ashamed of myself listening to those words. It was the first time in my long carrier of twenty years. I had the feeling that I chose the wrong side. I had made the wrong person win the case, which I was handling. Maybe I chose the wrong side to fight for. This thought was killing me. I was not able to move on with this thought. It was not the first time I was seeing someone get punished, but it was the first time, I was getting the feeling that the wrong person is being punished, just because I have won the case.

Soon, another client came to me and said, 'Sir, it's time for my case.' I stood up and started walking. I was not prepared for today's case. I asked the person, 'What is your name?'

'Sir, Sanjay, Gaurav ka dost, baat ki thi maine aapse kal.'

'Case kya tha tumhara?' I asked.

He gave me an angry look and said, 'Property dispute hai.' Sorry son, I don't remember anything I said to myself, but nodded my head as if I remembered everything.

I entered into the judgment room, people were looking at me and pointing fingers, I was used to it. I had never lost any case till date, I was the renowned advocate in the town. I was fighting the case, with no clue about the client, I asked my secretary to give me an overview of the case. She did, but my mind was stuck with the previous case, the thought was continuously running at the back of my head. The judge arrived and I realised that I would lose this case if I would not concentrate. My secretary revised the case; I fought the case and won it for my client. It hardly took me some time to win the case, it was the matter of money and the people in this country are more emotional for money, than for relations or human.

I went back to my cabin, with my secretary and the client, whom I had just won the case. My client thanked me for winning the case for him. I

won't even shake my hands with the people who come to me with the case of money matters. Gaurav is my very close friend and I could not say him no, for the case, so, I had to take it. Friends are more important for me than my ego. People called me khadus, satyawadi and what so not, but I never changed for them. I had my principles and I followed them, without even caring about what others feel or think about me, as I knew that people change their thought about me every day so I live my life for myself and not for them.

I was in the canteen with my secretary. She is a very young talented, smart and naughty girl. She is slim, with a very beautiful skin. Looking at her, reminded me of my wife at her young age. I don't have kids, so I looked at her as my daughter. We were having lunch and I asked her, 'What do you think about the case?'

'It was a good case sir, you fought well,' she said, with the cute smile on her face. She was trying to be diplomatic and play with my mind.

'I am asking about yesterday's case.'

She gave me a weird look and said, 'It was a tough case sir, you managed really well to win it.'

'Are you happy with the decision, do you feel we have punished the right person?'

'Hoo. . . How can you even ask this sir, that too today? You are breaking your own rule of not speaking about the case once it is closed.'

'It was an exceptional case,' I winked at her.

'Frankly, I felt bad for the person, he was looking very innocent to me and he was cute too.'

I laughed and said, 'Looks like you have developed some feelings for that guy.' She gave her best, naughty smile. I asked, 'Do you feel he was guilty?'

She, with confused look on her face, asked, 'Are you getting emotional with the case?'

'I don't know, it is since yesterday evening, I am getting the thought that we have punished the wrong guy.'

She lifted her eyebrows, as if saturated with my words and said, 'You are not the judge, you are the one to advocate, you just try to present facts

in front of the judge and he is the one who decides the convicted person and the severity of punishment. Where do you get all these thoughts from?’

I smiled at her and said, ‘I am an organic patient, I have thoughts disorder.’

She, finally getting a smile on her face, said, ‘Sometimes I feel you can be a better doctor than advocate.’

I laughed at her and gave her a look which made her realise that I was serious about the question. She was back in serious mood and said, ‘The guy looks innocent; he has not done a big mistake for which he is punished, but I didn’t understand one thing that why didn’t he accept to pay money instead of imprisonment.’

‘Exactly..!!, I am wondering the same thing and the worst part, while he was crossing me, before entering the police bus, he said that I am doing the wrong thing. He was not warning me, at least he didn’t look so, but he was worried and his decision of not accepting to pay the money, is making me rethink on the case. He is a Techie, so it’s not possible that he doesn’t have 50000 rupees to pay for buying his imprisonment. There is definitely something wrong.’

‘Hmmm, I know.’

‘Well, I am thinking too much,’ I said.

‘Thanks for realising it.’ We laughed and moved on, but the thought was running at the back of my head.

Days passed by, I fought many cases and won them all. I was setting up the record, day by day. I never thought about the person who was benefited with my work, was he a good guy or the bad guy, the only thing I knew was that I had to win the case and I did that, consistently. I had everything I wanted, in life, in fact the kind of professional life I dreamt of, I was living my dream, but that kid’s words were always running at the back of my head. It was changing the way I looked at things, the cases and people around me. I was cautious about the case I fought, I thought if I was doing anything wrong before every step I took. I started rejecting case which I felt were against my ethics. I was always trying to correct myself.

One afternoon, I was sitting in my cabin, reading some bullshit case file. My secretary asked, ‘Is everything ok?’

'Yes.'

'Doesn't look so,' said she.

I was surprised with her question, so I asked, 'What's going on?'

'You say me, looks like you had enough success in your life and you are in a mode to retire.'

I was completely unaware of the topic she was talking about, I asked, 'What made you think so?'

'You are rejecting every other case nowadays,' said she.

'I am not. . .!! Am I. . .?'

'Yes, you are,' said she, firmly, with anger in her eyes, as if I am doing something wrong. I looked down, thought for a while, I knew that it wasn't the time to play hide and seek, so I said, 'I may sound stupid, but I am seriously losing interest in these cases.'

She laughed at me, as if I have cracked some joke. She, making fun of me, said, 'I know, no one loves his job, but have to do it.'

'I loved my job, but that case has changed me.'

'Which case?'

'Shut it.'

'Please say it,' said she.

'The attempt to murder case of that guy, who didn't accept to buy out his imprisonments,' I said.

'Hooo fuck! Don't tell me that you are still struck in that case, I thought you have moved on with it.'

'I tried, but couldn't.'

'What is exactly in your mind?' she asked.

'I have the feeling that the kid is innocent.'

'What makes you feel so?'

I had no answer for it. 'To be frank, even I have that feeling and I don't have answer to it as well,' she said.

'I am not the odd one out then.'

She smiled at me and in an excitement said, 'Oooo. . . looks like, we have an adventurous case coming up. How about reading the case again, let's see if we can find anything.'

I laughed at her and said, 'Are you serious?'

'Why not, instead of feeling bad about it, better read it once again and see if we are wrong. What say?' It was a free time, as I was not interested in working on any case.

She brought the file and placed in front of me. There it was, the case file 'Harish Chandra attempt to murder case,' which I was thinking about day in and day out. I opened the file and went through it all over again to realise that the guy was charged with section 307 in an India penal code, 1860 'Attempt to murder'. Penalty for Attempt to murder depends on various things, like the extent to which one has tried to kill, the weapons used and many other things, but in his case, he had not used any harmful equipment, nor had he used any techniques. There were no high evidence against him, nothing to prove that he was the one who has harmed the girl, but I still won it, that too on the first day. Not because of my talent, but because the guy accepted his crime, that too without even rejecting for long. He initially demanded for justice, but accepted the crime once my witness, the girl he was about to marry, said that he was the one to harm her, tried to kill her. Though there were no witnesses, who can be considered in the case and only girl's statement can't be seen for punishing the guy, unless he accepts it by himself. He had not used any harmful things like (Kerosene or Knife), nor had he tried to kill her, in short. Maybe he was just angry with her and slapped her. As the attempt was not serious, the punishment can't be high too, so he was offered to pay Rs 50000 penalty or to accept imprisonment, but the guy chose the latter one, which was very outlandish.

I was happy to have won the case and never thought of a reason for the guy to accept the crime so easily, once said by the girl. The guy did not even bother to buy imprisonment; this was the most confusing step. First accepting crime easily on girl's note and then going to jail, why did he do that, what made him do that, these were the questions going in my mind, which indeed, had no answers. I discussed these questions with my secretary, but she had no answer too. 'There was something wrong for sure. When I read this file I get the feeling that this guy is either a psychopath or a Romeo.'

I laughingly said, 'Both are the same.'

'No, both are two very different people, which is very difficult to explain.'

My secretary was very precise to racism, she was an expressive person and I always tried to pull her legs, but not today. 'I was just kidding. I feel the guy is neither a psychopath nor a Romeo. He looked sensible and very practical. I somehow get the feeling that he is hiding something, we have to meet him to know more about it.'

'What? He will kill us if he would see us anywhere near him; after all we are the one who have changed his life,' she said. We laughed and continued with our work.

I went home, that day, with a thought in my mind of meeting the guy in the jail. I was in a deep thought till the point my wife opened the door and gave me the tightest hug, which made the day for me. But many questions were running in my head, why is my wife suddenly expressing so much love? Does she want anything from me? Is this the season for sales? Or is she about to make a demand for some jewellery? I gave her a confused smile and asked, 'My dear wife, is anything special today?'

She was rolling her hands on my head, started moving it down to my ears. She was acting naughty; I was not expecting this from her. It is like a dream coming true for a guy to see his wife seduce this way at the age of 42. I was about to kiss her and she pampered in my ears, 'My dear husband, if you go into the flashback and think about what happened on this date some years ago, you will realise that it is our anniversary today.' By the time she finished her words, her hands were on my ears, stretching and twisting it. I was afraid that she would kill me today, how can I forget our wedding anniversary, I wanted to make this up with something, 'Hooo. . . tumne to sara plan choupat kar diya, I had a plan to take you out on a surprise.'

She, with the wicked smile on her face, said, 'I know you very well baby, no need of making it up now, with a lie.'

I, held my tongue between my teeth, held my ears with two hands and said, 'Sorry be, I forgot the anniversary again.'

'No need of being so upset, I know how to keep myself happy.'

I was afraid with these words of hers, 'What do you mean?'

'He he, don't be afraid I am not seeing someone,' I got my breath back.

We went out for a candlelight dinner. On the way back, I was thinking of the case again, my wife asked me if everything was ok. I usually do not think about my cases when I am out of court, nor I discuss it with my wife, but this case was struck in my mind and I thought of discussing it with my wife. I told her about the case and to my delight she laughed at me and said, 'It is a simple straightforward case and you are thinking too much about it.' But she was surprised to see me serious; she then, said, 'Reopen the case if you feel something went wrong.'

'This is why I love you the most, you always support me, doesn't matter if you feel I am doing something right or wrong.'

She laughed at me and said, 'That is because I believe in what you do.'

'Jhoot mat bolo, mujpar koi kaise bharosa kar sakta hai, I won't trust myself.'

She laughed at me and naughtily said, 'Aab kya kar sakti hoon, shadi jo karli hai.' We enjoyed our ride home for some time pulling each other's legs, before reaching home.

I was thinking on my wife's words to reopen the case. I was not sure about anything, as I did not know much about the kid (Harishchandra). So, I decided to meet him and know him better, ask him for the details and clear my confusion. I asked my secretary to handle all the cases after lunch and I went straight to the jail, where that kid was placed. I took permission from the jailer to meet him and realised that I was his first and the only visitor till date. It had been one month and no one had come to visit him in the jail, which was very astonishing for me, as I had seen his parent in the court on judgment day. I waited for some time and a havaldar (Police constable) came to me and said, 'Saab, he is not willing to meet anyone.'

'Did you tell him that I am the visitor?'

'I told him, but he explicitly said he does not want to meet you in particular.' I was pissed off with these words. I straightaway went to the jailer and asked him to let me in and take me to Harishchandra. As the jailer is my friend, he agreed to let me in. I, in anger, rushed to Harishchandra. As I was entering, I saw many criminals, who looked ferocious, with largely grown beard, which looked unshaved for years. Some were sleeping and some were looking outside to see who has

entered their territory. There were few who even knew my name. I heard a sound, 'Kya Baat hai wakeel sahab, aap bhi under aagaye kya' and the bunch of people laughing on that. I was the point of discussion for few and entertainment for rest. I did not care and even if I cared, I could not have done anything to it. So, I just shut my mouth and went to the jail room in which Harshchandra was placed. The constable stopped before one of the room and said, 'Sahab, this is his room.' I looked inside to see a person sitting on the ground, facing the wall and his back was towards me. He had long hair which looked uncleaned for some time, huge biceps and triceps and looked nicely built. He was not wearing a T-shirt, which everyone else was wearing; instead he had kept it aside and was sitting there only on shorts. He was the only one in that room, whereas rest of the rooms had three people each. I looked at the constable and asked, 'Where is Harishchandra?' He, with a revelation looked at my face, said, 'He is the one sir.' I was little surprised to see him this way. He was an IT professional, very well-managed person and also not so very well-built. The constable continued, 'He just does exercise whole day and night, when he is not on field work.'

'Field work?'

'Yes sir, we have many activities in jail, like cooking, washing clothes, sometimes digging the ground and all. We use the prisoners to do that work.'

'I know it, but he has just joined a month ago.'

The constable laughed and said, 'We won't decide on who should work sir, it's the prisoner's head who decides, and in his case, I heard that harish is the one who chose to do all the activities. He always does one or the other activity in prison.'

I looked inside the jail and called, 'Harish.'

He looked back and turned towards the wall again and said, 'Why have you come here, didn't you get enough money to move to the next case?'

'I am not you, who see only money in his life.'

'Why are you here then?' He asked, with a taunting smile to end.

'I have to speak to you about something. I feel you are innocent. So, I have come here.'

He laughed at me and said, 'I myself never felt that way, how come you got that feeling and, to tell you the fact, I hate someone calling me with that word.'

I took a step back, 'Is it only me who is thinking that he is innocent? Am I a fool to think so?' Then I realised that maybe he is under depression, totally unstable and blaming himself for the crime he has not committed. 'One month in a jail, with this kind of people around, can make anyone feel the same way,' I said to myself. I asked him, 'What is making you blame yourself? I feel you have not done any crime, you are not a criminal and you won't deserve to be here.' He finally turned towards me, I was not able to recognise him first, he has changed, with big beard and moustaches on face, not as big as the rest, but still big enough to look like a non-innocent guy.

'Are you mad, I told you that I am not an innocent guy, but this doesn't mean that I am a criminal and yes, what made you feel that I have not done any crime?'

I was silent for some time, thinking, what made me feel so. I had no proof that he was not a criminal, it was just my mind or my heart, which was telling me that he was innocent. I said, 'I don't know, maybe I just have the feeling that you are not a criminal.'

He laughed at me and said, 'Are you sure that I am not a criminal?'

'I don't know, explain me, make me understand you.'

He laughed louder trying to make me irritated and act cool, 'Dear advocate sahab, please don't waste your time on me. I am a very complicated guy, please go home, take rest and go to the next case from tomorrow.'

'Just let me know one thing, have you done the crime you have been charged for?'

'Yes I have, I have attempted to kill her and there is no use of her being alive in this world.'

It was my time to act cool. I knew that these words were straight from his heart. I smiled at him and said, 'You are being sarcastic, aren't you?'

'Looks like, finally there is someone who believes in me.' I laughed at him, lastly I had brought the truth from his mouth.

'So, can we start with your story, I want to listen the end of your story.'

He gave a sarcastic smile and said, 'Story? Hmmm. . . Story? My life is a story for you.' I was silent, did not know what to say, as I was unaware of his mental status, anything could piss him off. He laughed and said, 'Don't think too much, I am not an emotional guy, I am the most practical guy you can ever find.'

'Thank god, I thought I had pissed you off by hurting your feelings.'

'Sahab, it's time out, we have to go now,' said the havaladar. I looked at Harish and asked, 'Are you innocent?'

'Wrong word again. I am not a criminal; this is what I can say you for the time being.'

'Do you want me to reopen your case? I will fight for you.'

He again gave a sarcastic smile and said, 'Please do investigate the case to the depth again, before you take any decision. You have not faced any failure till date, you may face one.'

'There is no one who can defeat me in this world, I just need your support.'

He laughed again and said, 'I am with you, but remember that it would be only you and me fighting against the world.'

'I am used to it. Take care,' said I.

'You need to do it more from now on,' said he. I laughed and moved out of the jail.

On my way back I was thinking about our conversation. I was pretty much impressed with the confidence Harish had in him. The way he spoke, he was in the jail, but still he was speaking as if he was doing a favour on me, or as if he knew that I was feeling guilty about his case. I loved the confidence he had, but was also curious to know the reason for him warning me on reopening the case.

I headed back to the court and asked my secretary to take out all the details about Harish.

'Who Harish?'

'Harishchandra.'

'The attempt to murder case guy?'

'Yes, I visited him in the jail today.'

She, with a surprised look on her face, said, 'Are you kidding me, we had a meeting for such an important case and you left me alone to handle the client for that guy.'

'I knew that you would handle them.'

She gave the naughty smile. I continued saying, 'I want to cancel all the cases which have their hearings for next two days'

'What?'

'Yes, I want to investigate on Harish's case.'

'Investigate? When did you start investigating cases, and it is however not our work, it's the police who does that, we are here just to fight with the evidence we have with us,' said she.

'Please don't teach me what is our work, instead inform the clients to find another advocate for themselves.'

'You are spoiling your name and in fact your business.'

I smiled at her and said, 'If you remember, I am an advocate, but not a business man.'

She was pissed off with me; she had the feeling that I was taking a very wrong step. I knew that I was doing wrong by asking my clients to pick up any other advocate at the middle of the case, but in the end my happiness was more important for me. I knew that I cannot live with the guilt feeling for rest of my life. I had to investigate and know more about that Harishchandra.

Next morning, my secretary came up with the details of Harishchandra. I knew that he was an IT employee, working in Mumbai. I saw his file to realise that he was from Raichur, Karnataka. He never gave me an impression that he was a South Indian, but what was he doing in Mumbai, so far from his house. Maybe his job made him stay here. I noted down his address and decided to visit his parents. I took out my car and asked my secretary to take care of my clients and told her that I would be out of station for few days. I asked my wife if she wanted to join me and she agreed. It had been a long time, since my marriage, we had been to any place out of Maharashtra. Driving was my passion once. I was ready to relive my teenage life.

Mann Ki Tasalli

We entered Raichur in an early dark morning. The place looked very calm, as if no one exists in the city. It had a mild moist in the air. The city was filled with trees all around, roads were calm as if I am meditating or driving in my dreams. It was a small place. I had asked my secretary to book a room for us and she did so. We reached the hotel and I had a sleep for few hours, I was not willing to get out of the bed, but I had to. I asked my wife to be in the hotel and take rest. I went out in search of the Harishchandra's house. As soon as I came out of my hotel, I met the real Raichur. It was just 11 a.m. and the sun was already burning, it was boiling hot. The place was not so big and complicated enough. So, I found the house pretty easily. I knocked the door and looked around the house. It was a pretty good house, it had an open area in front of the door. I also saw many trees around, which were very difficult for me to find in Mumbai. Haldi, kumkum on the door steps. I prepared myself to meet a decent middle class Indian family. Then I saw the nameplate on the door 'Rajaram Singh Thakur' written in golden colour, with black background. It changed my mind all of a sudden, as I was entering a Rajput's house. Suddenly all old Hindi movies started flashing in front of my eyes, where Thakur's are usually the rich, khadoos people who have zero emotions.

I waited for some time and no one answered, I knocked again. I heard a heavy voice from inside 'Han aa raha hun.' The voice was very heavy, sounded like Thakur's voice in old movie, very strong. A person in mid fifties opened the door. He had a nicely cropped, trimmed hair, with nicely shaped moustaches and a healthy physic. He, welcoming me inside his house, said, 'Aur advocate sahab, kaise aana hua?'

'Do you know me?'

'Yes, I obviously do. In fact, I was kind of expecting you for some days now.' He said it in an old Hindi villain style, which made me blank. I was shocked.

'Excuse me.'

He laughed and said, 'It's complicated, please come in.'

It was a small drawing room, coloured in yellow. Music bells hanged in all the corners, posters of wild animals on the wall, it had a beautifull

interior, made of sagwan wood. There was a leather cover sofa and a divan, with two chairs and a glass-table at the centre. The house looked very clean, as if it was being cleaned very other hour. The floor was shinning bright, *maybe the less pollution in the air is allowing it to be so clean*, I said to myself. Showcase was filled with mementoes, or can say cups. 'It's my son's,' said Rajaram, when he saw me staring at them.

'So. . . how can I help you?' He asked in a very sweet friendly way. Showing his hand towards divan, asking me to have a seat.

'I want to know about your son. What made him end up in Jail?' said I, taking the seat.

Rajaram with a depressing smile, looked down. He looked to be in a pain. I said, 'It is ok, you can take your time. I know it should be hurting.'

He laughed at me and said, 'I am not hurt that my son is in the jail, I am more hurt with the direction in which the people of this country are progressing. The way they think, the way they work and the way they lose trust in each other, I am upset with everything. Pata nahi iss desh ka kya hoga.'

I was totally confused, I have come here with the thought that I have disturbed a healthy living family's future, but the situation here is completely different. This person sitting in front of me is continuously proving me wrong, he is worried more about his country than his own son. Is he acting smart or is he unstable due to the shock of his son ending up in the jail, or is he really patriotic? There were many questions going in my mind, I was not sure what to say.

'Don't worry about the country, worry about your son, as there are many people who are placed to think about the country, but no one to think about your son.'

He gave me the angriest Rajput look, as if I had done something against his will. He suddenly looked down, calmed himself and said, 'This is our country, and this is the way my country people think. The most educated and the smartest person of my country says that I want to be happy and keep my family happy, doesn't matter even if it is hurting others.'

I looked down, with no clue what to say. 'Why the fuck is this guy so serious, can't he just think about saving his son!' said my mind.

He then smiled and said, 'Shut it, doesn't matter anyways. Let us discuss about my son.'

'Can I have a glass of water please?'

He in his loud voice said, 'Thoda Pani Lana tho.'

A lady dressed in silk sari, having a body filled with gold, a large bindi on her forehead a pretty healthy, came out with a bottle of water and a glass in her hand. 'She is my wife,' said Rajaram.

I, while having water, asked, 'Why did your son try to kill her?'

He smiled and said, 'My son is not the one who is impatient. He is the most patient person you can see. In fact patience is the key for his success. He has not tried to kill anyone.'

'Why did he accept in the court that he had tried to kill Akruti?'

He looked down, with a disheartening smile on his face and said, 'It's a long story.'

'I would love to hear it.'

'I can't say you all, but for the time being I can say his ending up in jail.'

'As you wish, sir.'

He began, 'My son is a very stubborn guy. He makes his own rules and follows them very precisely. Only he himself can modify his rules, he is correct most of the times, but also wrong a few times. Whenever he is wrong, he won't take much of the time to correct himself. He has a very good sense, which makes it easy for him to realise that he is going wrong.'

Meanwhile, Rajaram's wife came out, with three cups of tea in her hand and handed over to me and Raja Ram. It was the most delicious tea I had in long time. I was just enjoying the tea and his wife said, 'It is the girl, she made him mad and her dad is the one who made my son go to jail.'

I was not sure if to enjoy the tea or to console her, as her tea was obviously sweeter than her words. I somehow managed to finish the tea, by having a sip as slow as possible, trying to have it for as long as possible, as I was feeling like having it more and more. I kept my cup on the table and asked, 'Girl? Which girl?'

She, with tear in her eyes and anger on her face, said, 'That same girl, whom he loved, she betrayed him. My son was such an innocent guy; it's her, who made him this way.'

'Shut up, no one can change your son's mind. And more over, he is not a kid whose mind can be manipulated. He is a mature guy and he knew exactly what was he doing and what would it lead to,' said Rajaram.

'You always support that girl.'

Rajaram laughed and said, 'I am not supporting anyone, I am just saying the truth. Your son is like the kings of past, he won't listen to anyone, just make everyone follow him and his way of thinking and he thinks too far ahead,' rolling his hand on her head. I was getting emotional, looking at the love both still had for each other. It was the toughest time for them, their only son was jailed. I thought of leaving them alone for some time and came out of the house, for a fag.

It was a sunny afternoon; I was having a fag, sitting on the cot, placed in front of the house and just below the tree. It was a calm place, sitting under the shade of a tree, I was feeling sleepy and I heard a sound, 'Koun ho beta?' I turned around to see an old lady heading towards me. I said, 'Koi nahi dadi, Thakurji se milne aaya hun.'

'Mumbai se ho kya?'

'Yes.'

'Kaisa hai mera Harish?'

'Theek hai.'

'Don't know what was wrong with him, I still didn't get the reason for him being so emotional. Everyone takes dowry, he should have also taken it, don't know the reason why he had to act too smart in that.'

'What did he do?'

She gave me a shocking look and said, 'Are you not from his office?'

'No, I am not from his office.'

'Ok, he had filed a case against the girl's parents, but it went against him and he is in jail now.'

I was not sure if I have to believe this lady, as I knew that people just keep making stories, which keeps adding up lies upon lies. I finished my

fag and entered the house. I saw that Rajaram was sitting on a sofa and watching TV. He asked, 'Do you have a wife?' 'Yes, she is here with me, in Raichur.'

He was surprised and said, 'Why didn't you bring her here then, she must be alone in the room.'

'Yes, she is alone, but she needed rest after a long journey.'

He then, asked, 'Why are you investigating about my son, he is serving his punishment ordered by the judge.'

'I know he is, that is the reason I am here. I feel that he is innocent.'

'Yes, he is, indeed. But who believes him in this world?'

'I believe him.'

'What makes you believe him?' asked he.

'I don't know, I just feel that he is innocent; it is you, who has to convince me that he is innocent.'

He smiled at me and said, 'Finally there is someone who wants to listen his part of the story.' I smiled and said, 'I am waiting for it.'

He began, 'A year ago, my son had come home just to visit us. One day, I was sitting on a chair outside, having my morning tea, with the paper in hand. My son came to me and said, 'Dad, I am in love with a girl,' for which I laughed at him and said, 'Everyone does that, but the most important thing is, does she love you too?'

He laughed at me and said, 'Itna nalayak bhi nahi hai apka beta.'

'What is her name?' for which he replied, 'Akruti.'

'So, what are the plans?'

He said, 'I want to marry her.'

I was happy listening to it, as I too had a love before marriage, but could not marry her due to certain circumstances. I still feel bad for that girl, as I have given her many hopes, but could not fulfil those hopes. I did not want my son to do the same. So, I wanted my son to follow his heart and get everything he wanted in his life. I was happy for him. I asked him to show her picture. He did. The girl was gorgeous and beautiful. I wondered how she could fall in love with a guy like my son. She had a silky long hair, milky white skin, sharp nose, cute lips and a light blue

eyes. Eye lid were filled with liners. She was wearing a suit. I, looking at her image, said, 'It is yes from my side.'

'I knew it.'

'How did such a beautiful girl fall in love with you, is she dumb? I have to check her IQ before getting her married to you.'

'It is my talent, dad.'

'Aakhir beta kiska hai!'

He laughed and said, 'Dad, please convince mom.'

I smiled at him and said, 'Beta, shadi tu kar raha hai, aur daat mai khaun. Marrying the person you love is not that easy, you have to face everyone in this world to get her to you.'

He smiled at me and said, 'Just say that you are afraid of mom, I myself will say her. Why are you giving so many excuses?'

I knew that he is pulling my leg and trying to get away from this responsibility. I said, 'Haan, I am afraid of your mom. You are the most daring person on this earth. Why don't you just go and say her then?'

He looked down and then looked at me with a worried face and said, 'Please help me dad, at least support me when I show her the picture.'

I smiled at him and said, 'Don't worry, she will approve her.'

'Are you sure?'

'She is my wife, if you remember.'

He laughed and said, 'That is the reason why I am asking you to show her the picture.' My wife joined us at the same time, she asked, 'Kya discussion chal raha hai Baap bête ke beech?'

My son was expecting me to start the proceedings, but I did not have the guts to do that and he had no option but to say. He did. He said, 'Mummy, mai ek ladki se pyar karta hun.'

She gave him a shocking look, as if he had committed some crime and nodding her head, indicated to give her more details. He said, 'She was my colleague; I liked her from the early days of my training. We were good friends, but started loving each other as we joined the same company.'

'Sabkuch bata diya, naam koun mai bataunga?' I said.

'Akruti, Akruti is her name.'

'Akruti kya?' she asked him.

'Akruti Singh.'

'Where is she from?' she continued with her questions.

'She is a North Indian, she is from Delhi.'

My wife looked at me and said, 'I told you not to send your son to Bangalore for studies, look at him now. He didn't get anyone in the whole state to love, but the North Indian girl.'

'What is wrong in that and no one plans and loves someone. They just love. Love just happens.'

'You too take his side, those North Indian girls are very fast. Their culture is different from ours.'

'Don't generalise things. Every individual is different; you cannot decide the character of a person depending on the place where he belongs to. And moreover, if your son has chosen someone, he should have thought about it.'

'He is still a kid. He doesn't know what is good and what is wrong. I just don't want him to suffer later.'

I looked at my son. He was biting his finger nails and smiling at us. I told my wife, 'Your son is of the age to have his own kid now and you are saying that he is a kid?'

My son laughed and so did my wife. My wife continued, 'I am just worried about him' with a cute worried expression of hers.

'Don't worry, he will be alright.'

'Anyways, don't you want to see her picture?' I asked.

'He has her image? Looks like someone has come prepared,' she said, pointing her words to my son.

We all laughed and my son was trying his best to act innocent. But he could not, as he was not at all innocent from any angle. He showed her picture to his mother, she got a smile on her face as soon as she saw the girl's photo. I knew that she would like her. I said, 'Harish, I think we

should have shown your girlfriend's photo before having a debate, we should have won it long back.'

My wife smiled at me and said, 'Theek hai, she is exactly the kind of Bahu I wanted to bring to this house.' She was changing her topic of discussion, as she was interested in this girl now. 'I am ok with this girl, does she speak Kannada?' I and my son laughed trying to make her understand that she was not used to Kannada, as she was not exposed to it.

Rajaram was deeply involved in the story. I wanted to skip few things, so, I said, 'So, you both approved him to marry the girl he liked.'

'That was the biggest mistake of our life, we should not have done that. Our son could have been happily married to some other girl today,' said Harish's mom.

Rajaram in a calm voice, said, 'Shut up, it was not a mistake. Go and sleep, don't increase your blood pressure. Nothing is going to come back now.' She went inside and Rajaram lighted a fag, before continuing with the story.

'We went to the girl's house in Delhi.'

'You visited Delhi?' I asked.

'Yes, we had to. It was after all my son's love. I, as a father, wanted my son to marry the girl he wanted. So, we landed in Delhi on April 4.'

'Which was just six months before from now,' I said.

He nodded his head and said, 'Yes, just six months ago. I landed in Delhi, it was the first time I was visiting Delhi. It was burning hot, when I came out of my flight. It was the first time we were experiencing the heat. We were received by Akruti's brother, Anshuman, at the airport. He took us to their place in his car. My son had seen Delhi earlier, as he has travelled to lot of places for his job. He showed us many places on the way. We loved the view of Delhi. The roads were very wide and beautiful. We headed directly to the hotel which we had already booked, freshened up and went to meet Akruti. We soon reached the house, it was a big bungalow. As soon as we entered the main gate, we saw two large German Sheppard dogs barking at us. My son loved dogs. We had a dog at home earlier and my son knew the trick to make them friendly. It hardly took some time for him to make those dogs his friends. Anshuman was surprised to see this, he said, 'Kya baat hai

Harish, getting friendly with these dogs is very difficult but looks like they are already friendly with you!

'You just need to show them that you care for them; they just need love like us.'

'Hmmm. . . looks like you just know how to love, doesn't matter if it's human or animal.'

My son laughed and said, 'Maybe, I just try my level best to give my love to as many as possible.'

'Don't even dare to give your love to any other girl or my sister will kill you for sure,' said Anshuman.

They were busy discussing things and I was looking around the house, the house had a big veranda, a nice garden with all the grass trimmed nicely. Looked like the garden was very well maintained. Anshuman called us inside. As we entered into the house we saw a big table and some chairs in the room. 'It is the guest room, for people who come to meet my dad,' said Anshuman. We crossed the room to enter the drawing room, which was very big, having many pairs of swords stuck on the walls, varieties of whiskeys kept in the showcase, small flower pots here and there. A big carpet on the floor. There were two giant sofas, black in colour. A glass-table at the centre. I saw that all the doors had a horse head shaped design. It gave me the feeling that I had entered into the Rajput's house. I was feeling proud to be there. We were welcomed by Akruti and her mother. Akruti was looking very beautiful, more beautiful than I had imagined. She wore a nicely crafted shalwar, blue in colour and a white pajama. We sat on a sofa which looked very expensive, felt very soft and gave a lot of comfort. I was not that rich to purchase a sofa of that standard. I loved the interior of that house. There were many varieties of show materials hanging on the walls, the house looked very attractive. Soon came Akruti's father (Akash Singh), rushing into the drawing room. We had spoken on phone earlier, so it was not that uncomfortable for us.

He said, 'I have asked panditji to come, he should be joining us soon. Meanwhile we can have breakfast.'

'It is fine with us,' said I. We all headed to the dining hall. I had never seen such a big dining table earlier in my life. I asked, 'The dining table looks very big for the family of four members.'

Akash said, 'We live in a joint family, it is just that everyone is busy attending one of our relatives' marriage, the house looks empty.' We were having Poha for breakfast and were soon joined by panditji. Akash had already submitted the kundali's of Harish and Akruti for matching. We finished our breakfast and went back to the drawing room. Panditji said, 'Looks like the pair has been made in heaven. Their kindali matches perfectly.' We all were happy with the news that panditji gave us. Though my son does not believe in all these formalities, he felt good listening to it. The smile on his face said it all.

Akash asked the panditji, 'When is the good date for marriage?'

Panditji said, 'We have a date in next month and the next date is after five months, which is October 22.'

My son was not interested in hurrying up, so we decided to have a date in October. Once everything was fixed Akash asked, 'Sab kuch ho gaya hai to abhi len den ki bhi baat ho jaye.'

'We don't need anything. . .'

My son interrupted me and said, 'Nahi sir ! Hame kuch nahi chahiye.'

'Kuch to le lo,' said Akash.

'Mangne par aapne to heera hi de diya hai, aab koi paisa ya sona humhe nahi chahiye,' said my son.

Akash was very much impressed with these words. 'No doubt my daughter has chosen the best guy on this planet.' These words from Akash made me proud too, to be gifted with a son with such a character.

We had a nice chat after that, discussed about each other's families, relatives, cultures etc. My wife was very much interested in knowing their culture and so was Akruti's mom, as they wanted to know the differences in the cultures of the people of the same religion living in different places. Finally both were not much disappointed with the outcome. They had realised that place did not matter much for the people to follow their culture. Akash asked about our plans of the trip. My son explained him about all our plans of visiting many places. He suggested few and gave more emphasis on Agra for The Taj Mahal; I realised the reason for him to do so, when I saw the beautiful monument. We visited many places before coming back home.

Few days later, Akash and his brother, Arpit, along with Akruti and her mom, came to visit us. I had renovated my home by then, I changed the interior and tried my best to make it look better than what it actually was. Our house was is not so big enough, nor were we so rich to make our house look mind-blowing, but we tried our best to make it as good looking as possible. We got the house painted, furniture changed and bought a new TV. My son borrowed a car from his friend to receive them at the railway station. We had booked a room at SLV hotel, which was the best hotel in the town. They freshened up and came to our house. Akash was happy to see a small house, with sweet and small family. Akash introduced me to his younger brother Arpit, he looked a bit aggressive. We chit chatted for some time, before having Idli sambar, made by my wife, at breakfast. It was the first time that Akruti had come to our place, so my wife gifted her with some jewelleryes and sweets. We had a nice chat for a day long; Akash in between the chat said, 'Is Harish and Akruti going to stay at the same house after marriage?'

'No, we don't have any IT industry in this district, so obviously they won't stay here. But they can stay in Bangalore, or Hyderabad, or even Mumbai. Everything depends on their own choice, as they are grown up to decide where to stay. We may join them once I am retired,' said I.

Arpit said, 'But, do you have a flat in any of those cities?'

'No. . .' I was about to say something, but was interrupted by my son. My son said, 'No, we don't have it currently, but I will buy it soon.' Arpit smiled at him and said, 'It is not an easy task, son.' For which my son said, 'I know it, but nothing is easy in life, I have the confidence that I will do it. Even if I don't, I will ensure you that I will keep Akruti happy, never let her happiness get spoiled due to lack of money.'

Akash laughed and said, 'After all, you don't need money to keep someone happy.' We all smiled and Arpit appreciated the confidence my son had in him, but he looked little unhappy with our financial condition and I understood his situation too. After all, he belonged to a very rich family, where the girls get married to a guy, who is usually richer to them, but Akruti had chosen the other way round. As a parent, I understood Arpit's situation and a way of thinking. I knew that he was just worried about Akruti's future and he should be fine once he knows my son properly. We had long chat about the places nearby. My wife was preparing lunch for all, Akruti helped her in doing so, trying to impress her. She was successful to an extent. We had heavy lunch, non-

veg. It was my son's favourite. My wife, Akruti and her mom were busy looking at the old photos and discussing about the serials, after the lunch and we were busy with our chit chat. Day ended the same way, I offered them to stay here for a day more, but Akash said that he has some business to attend, so left back to Delhi, the same night.

I was happy that everything was going on smoothly, my son was also very happy to get his dream come true. He was happy with his professional life and also personal.

Around two months later, my son said that he was getting calls from Arpit and he wanted to have a word with me. My son looked little irritated. I asked him, 'Is everything ok?'

'Not exactly, but yes, just listen to what he wants to say, don't lose your patience to him.'

Next day, I got a call from Arpit. After discussing about the good wellness for some time, he said, 'Rajaram, from the point I met you, at your house, I am just wondering, what could be the reason for you not to demand any money at the marriage. You can consider it as a gift, it's your right to demand for money and it also keeps us happy,' in a very serious tone.

'How can anyone be happy giving his money to others?'

'You would have understood if you had a daughter, no one in this world wants his/her daughter to be unhappy after marriage. We don't want to do anything, which we would regret, from our side. If you have any demand you can ask us now, no need to have any formality.'

I was confused with these words of him. I thought that maybe being in the world, where every day in news we see one or the other case of dowry, anyone could be afraid. So I thought of taking his words lightly. 'Arpit sahab, aap befikar rahiye! Your daughter is in the safe hands. You are lucky that I and my son both have very less importance for money in our lives.'

He laughed at this and said, 'Rajaramji ek bath bolta hun bura na manna!'

'Batao.'

'Everyone in this world lives for money, works to earn money and want to get rich and rich, as one wants to fulfil his dreams. There is nothing

wrong if you do the same. And to be practical, you are not a very rich person, you obviously need money for fulfilling your dreams, why don't you just demand the amount and take it?'

I was losing my patience and the words were not looking friendly anymore. I was not able to understand the reason for him to say so. Doesn't he trust us, or is he worried about his daughter's future? I was very much tensed, as I did not want to spoil my son's future with my anger. I, trying to make things little less serious, said, 'Aap chinta na karein, kuch chahiye to mai khud mang lunga.'

'Theek hai, jaisi aapki marzi,' he said in a depressed voice. I did not want to continue on the same topic as I did not have confidence on my patience. I changed the topic and he looked least interested in the other topics I discussed. We spoke for some time, before we ended our conversation.

I spoke to my son after the call and told him about my conversation with Arpit. My son told me that Arpit was a very caring person; he just cared for Akruiti and worried that she should not regret her decision later on. I said, 'Regret, what do you mean by regret?'

'Dad, regret in the sense, he is just worried, they are rich people and they were expecting her to marry a rich guy, but she choose me,' said my son in a depressing voice.

I was shattered with my son's words. 'Look, I know that we are not rich people. I know that we don't have any money given to us by our ancestors, nor I did anything big to make a lot of money, but the situation we are in, today, is much better than what we were previously. Just be proud of what you have done so far, I know you are not an extraordinary talented guy, but still you are a very good human and I feel that is the most important thing.'

My son after being silent for sometime, said, 'Dad, it is you and me, who think that way. We cannot expect everyone to be the same and they are not wrong too. Everyone has their own way of thinking and we are not the one to judge them wrong.'

I had never seen my son say anything so seriously, he sounded very disturbed and confused. I wasn't sure what should I say to him. "Just calm down son, I know many things are going in your head. Just take a break and be positive. You are not a kind of person who would be worried about the loss. Just be confident.'

He took a long breath and in a depressing voice said, 'Hmm, I know dad. But sometimes things get out of hands and look uncontrollable.'

'Happens. . .!!'

He was silent for few seconds, so I asked, 'Is there anything you want to say?'

He was silent again and I sensed that he wanted to say something, but was not comfortable. So I said, 'Don't worry son, you can take your time. Just sit down and think about it with a calm head. You can say it to me when you feel that it is the right time to say.'

'Hmmm.'

I was feeling sad for my son. I had the feeling that things were moving on smoothly, but how can things be smooth in a love story. Everything was perfect, but still people find ways to make it unsatisfactory. My son looked very disturbed whenever we spoke to him. My wife was also getting disturbed with this, she was worried about my son.

One day, after a month, my son called me at night and in a very disturbing voice said, 'Dad, I have to say you something.'

'Finally. . ., say. . .'

'Dad, I am fed up these guys, they want me to take money from them, but I don't want to.'

I laughed at him and said, 'Beta, why are you so stubborn, if someone wants to give you some money with love, then just take it. What is wrong in that?'

'Dad, why didn't you take it?'

I didn't have words to say, I was silent for some time and then said, 'Noone offered me the money at my marriage and they just asked if I need anything. I didn't demand. I should have taken it if someone was offering me,' and laughed.

'I am serious, dad.'

'Money was not so much important in life when I got married. Feeling had more value than money.'

'Exactly. . .!!! The same applies today.'

I cut his words and said, 'No, it is a competitive world, you need money to fight and survive in this world.'

'Just that world has become competitive; it doesn't mean that one should take money from others to be in the competition.'

'One? Why are you bothered about others, just say what you feel.'

'I will earn the money that I want for my living. I will not take it from others.'

I laughed and said, 'They are not asking you to become so called GHAR JAMA, they just want you to have some money, which they feel, belongs to their daughter.'

He laughed too and said, 'Dad, looks like your mind is changing as well. The easy way of earning looks candy to you.'

'No son, I followed the rules I made in my life, but I don't want you to follow them just because I followed them, there is a difference in the generations. Your thinking should match the thinking of your generation.'

'Dad, demanding for dowry was an illegal act then, so is it today.'

'People were poor in my generation. They couldn't afford so much of money that was demanded by the groom,' said I.

'So does today, if you check the paper you would see approximately 9000 dowry cases every year. These cases are not because 9000 people demanded for dowry, it is because the bride wasn't able to fulfil the demand. Each and every person today, demands for dowry. If people have become rich, the grooms are also getting standardised; they are demanding even more amount, which is again very difficult for the bride to adjust.'

I said, 'I agree that demanding money is bad, but your case is different. You are not demanding money, you are just taking the given amount.'

'No, I don't want to become one of those people who want the money but couldn't demand it, just because they know that they will obviously get it. And most of all I feel that giving the money is equally illegal, as demanding the money,' said he.

'Don't tell me what is legal and what is not, we break law every day in our lives.'

'I am not saying about the law set by government, I am only expressing what I feel, is wrong and shouldn't happen,' said he.

'Please explain.'

'Too complicated dad, I can't explain to you.' I was silent for few seconds and he said, 'People like these, change the habits of people like me and soon it becomes trends on.'

I was thinking on my son's words. He had a very different way of thinking, maybe everyone from his generation thinks the same way, but it was new to me.

'No, not everyone from his generation thinks this way, but yes, few may think this way,' I told Rajaram, who was speaking most of the time. I was feeling tired and my ass was paining, sitting on the same chair, I said Rajaram Singh that I will be back after a fag. While having a fag, I was thinking about the father and son. Is it possible for anyone to be so impractical, how can anyone be so stubborn, or can say so ethical. I was just thinking of it and the old lady, sitting below the tree asked, 'What do you do? Why are you here?'

I turned towards her and said, 'I am an advocate and I am here to investigate the issue of Harish going to the jail.'

'It is a very complicated case, you may have to work hard for it.'

I smiled at her and said, 'I have gone old, fighting cases, don't worry, I will do it easily.'

'God Bless you,' said she.

I finished my fag and entered into the house, I saw Rajaram was in his deep thought. I took my seat. 'It was my mistake,' said Rajaram.

'What?'

'Yes, it was me who didn't control my son, I should have said him to forget the ethics and follow the world,' he continued.

'I cannot understand, anything.'

He gave me a blank look, which made me blank too. I was not able to make out his feeling from his expression. He looked down in a depression and continued with his story, 'It was just a month left for the marriage and we had started all the arrangements for it. My son came home drunk, it was the first time he had come home in that way. I had

the hint that he boozed occasionally, in weekends and parties, but I wasn't expecting him to come home fully drunk, completely out of his senses. I picked him up outside my house, before entering the house and took him to the other room, from back gate, so that his mother won't see him. I made him enter into the room and asked him to sleep. I switched off the light, said him good night and was about to leave the room. 'Dad, do you feel that I am doing the right thing?'

'What do you mean?'

'I feel that I am not doing the right thing by marrying Akruiti.'

I was traumatised to listen these words from him. I said, 'Are you out of your mind? She is the person you loved the most and wanted to get married, just a month left for marriage, everything is going smoothly and you are saying these words to me!'

'Nothing is going smoothly dad, everything looks smooth from outside, but nothing is as it looks,' said he.

'What is going on, son?'

'There are many things going on dad, I feel that I won't deserve that sweet girl. I feel that I can't keep her happy, as we are not as rich as her dad is.'

'Is this the issue? Just believe in yourself and move on. It is not your current financial condition which will decide whether you can keep her happy or not, it indeed is your talent which will decide whether you have the ability to earn sufficient money to keep her happy. If you ask me, money can give you happiness, but not satisfaction.'

'Everyone is not like you, dad.'

'Yes, everyone has their own way of thinking and I feel this way and I don't say that everyone has to follow the same way of thinking.' I continued after a minute's break, 'Whatever maybe the way of thinking, but it should not stop you from marrying the girl you loved, that too after coming so close to marriage.'

'You cannot understand my situation, dad.'

'Everyone has problems in their lives and everyone feels that his situation is the toughest. So, you better sleep now. We will discuss this topic when you are in your senses.'

I came out of that room, totally confused with my son's words and reaction. I wanted to know the reason behind his behaviour.

Next day, I was sitting on a sofa, having my breakfast. My son, after getting freshen up, sat on a table next to me, with his head down and eyes filled with nervousness. He was afraid to look into my eyes, as he was not sure about my reaction on his yesterday's behaviour. I looked at him and shouted to my wife, 'Bring some lime water for us, it is good to have it early in the morning.' My son looked at me, with a smile on his face. I smiled at him and said, 'Booz, but be conscious'

He, trying to hide his smile, made a serious face and said, 'I am always dad, but some time it's good to be out of control.'

I did not want to discuss the matter early in the morning, that too in front of my wife, so I, with a thoughtful smile, nodded my head, indicating him that I understood what he meant to say. I heard a voice of my wife from inside, 'Who will eat the dosa which I have made for you both and it is not so hot to have lime water so early in the morning.'

I smiled at my son and said, 'She is the home minister of this house and you can't go against her order and you know it better.'

He smiled and said, 'Don't worry dad, I don't have a hangover' by winking his eyes. I smiled back at him. My son got up and started walking into the kitchen, indulge his mom.

After having the breakfast, I switched on the T.V. and saw that cricket match was going on. I loved watching cricket, but never remembered the schedule correctly. I was excited to see that the match was live on TV. I called my son, as he was as interested as I was. I said, 'Son, it is India versus Australia, your favourite.' He came and sat next to me. We were watching cricket for some time and my son said, 'I should have become a cricketer dad; I missed out the opportunity and wasted my talent.'

'You have realised it very soon!! You have gone old to try now,' I said, winking at him.

He, with a sad smile, said, 'I know I have grown old for cricket, which is the most tormenting part of my life. I can't try again!!' He looked very serious when he said that, which concerned me.

'You have not wasted your talent, you have represented Karnataka state for one year. I know that you should have played higher level than that,

but this doesn't mean that you have not tried. You gave your best, but situations demanded something else. So it's ok, no need to be upset about anything and moreover, we have discussed about it many times, it was my mistake too. I never supported you.'

He shook his head and said, 'It's not your mistake dad, it is mine. I didn't have the guts to take up the risk. I was afraid. I should have taken the risk. I didn't believe in my own abilities. How could I have expected you to back me up?'

'You are doing an awesome job, you are into one of the biggest companies in the IT industry and you are earning good.'

'I am earning good, but I can never have the wealth that others have, with this kind of earning. I need to do something. I should have become a cricketer.'

'What is the hurry, my son? You have the whole life before you, to build up the wealth for yourself and your family.'

'I need money to build a family, dad.'

'You have not even started a family and you already, look to be in pressure.'

He smiled and said, 'No dad, I am serious; I am feeling like a loser.'

'And what is that which is making you feel so?'

'We have nothing with us dad. I don't even have a car of my own.'

He was acting like an immature for the first time in his life. I always felt that he has gained maturity very early in his life. 'You are acting like an immature. Why are you even thinking about money, car and all this bullshit? You can earn money, buy a car, take your own house and live happily. After all Roti, Kapda aur Makan is our basic need from long time,' I laughed saying it.

He smiled and said, 'I know Dad, but there are few people who feel that I am very poor to get married to Akruti and they want me to take dowry, for becoming rich. They feel that I cannot keep Akruti happy, just because I don't have car.' He was continuing it, before I broke in between and said, 'And they want you to take car in dowry? Just forget about the people who say these words. I said this many times and I am telling you again. JUST CARE FOR THE PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOU.'

'I know it dad, these things were said by the people who, I feel, care for me.'

'Who said those words?'

'Arpit. He feels that I am very poor to marry his daughter and I should better take money and car from his brother to keep Akruti happy. I tried to explain him that I don't have anything for the time being, but this doesn't mean that I can't earn it, I can and I will earn, but he is not ready to accept it. It is very difficult for me to make them understand that it is not because of money I loved Akruti, but it is because for the kind of person she is and the same is with her. She loved me as a human and she should have never loved me if she ever gave highest priority to money in her life and that is the reason I love her. I respect her thought and she accepted me the way I am, but people are not able to understand this same thing.'

I could see the fear and anger in his eyes. It looked like he had already tolerated this for long time and was really irritated with it. I tried my best to make him relaxed and when he did relax, I asked him to tell the story from the beginning, which he did. After listening to his story I realised that Arpit was mentally torturing my son. I was not sure if he was really worried about Akruti or was it something else going on in his head. But for the mean time I asked my son to calm down, concentrate on the marriage and nowhere else.

Days passed by and my son was getting over Arpit, by not picking his calls, most of the times. Arpit realised that my son had started taking him lightly, so he called me once. He tried to convince me with his philosophical words, but I stood firm on my ethics. He finally gave up hopes to convince me and hung up.

Some days later, Harish was sitting on the sofa, with his head down and hands on his head. I went close to him and said, 'What is on, son?'

He took out his hand from his head and looked up at me, very tensed and filled with anger, which frightened me. I asked again, 'What is wrong, son? Is everything ok?'

He nodded his head, saying NO. I asked, 'Hua kya hai, and why are you sitting this way. Your mom would get a heart attack if she see's you like this. Get up and get going.'

He did not get up and instead got tears in his eyes. I got serious now, I sat next to him, with my hands on his shoulders and asked, 'What is wrong?'

He, with anger, said, 'I feel like killing that ass hole.'

'Who?'

'Arpit.'

I was pissed off by his choice of words. I said, 'This is not the way you speak about elders and don't forget he is about to be your father-in-law' in a heavy voice.

'I know it dad, but I don't have patience any more. He tried his best to convince me for dowry and now he is torturing Akruti, saying that the guy she has selected for marriage is way below the level, of the kind of guy he expected her to get married.'

'I think ke woh tujhe ghar jamai banana chahata hai,' I laughed while saying. He smiled too, but with pain. I continued, 'I know it is the tough time, but don't get shattered away with these things. You will always find people who don't believe in you and you will always find people who never encourage you, as you know that encouraging someone is the most difficult thing in this world.'

'I know it dad, I am not expecting any kind of encouragement from Arpit, I just want him to keep his way of thinking to himself and not force others to follow his way of thinking.'

'Akruti is smart enough to know what to follow and what not to, so just chill, she will manage him. No need of you worrying so much about her. I think you are feeling insecure, which is not necessary.'

'No dad, you are taking me wrong. I believe in Akruti and I trust her a lot, but sorry to say that you are not aware of what was actually going on for the last few days. I am the culprit for that.'

'What do you mean by that, say it now if that is the case.'

'It all started few days ago when Arpit insisted Akruti on meeting a new guy for her marriage. She somehow declined, but she was pissed off and so was I,' he was continuing and I, interrupted him saying, 'How can he do such an insane thing, that too when the marriage is fixed and everyone is happy, no one has any problem? The girl doesn't have any problem, her dad and her mom has no problem. Why does he have such

a negative feeling about us? We don't have an ego going with us, but this doesn't mean that he will test our patience to this level. I will speak to Akash about this thing. I know that we are poor, but we do have the respect, much more than any rich guy. He might have earned money, but we have earned respect, which according to me is the most difficult thing, than earning money.'

'Akash uncle isn't aware of this dad. Let me finish, the story has gone worse than this. Arpit started torturing Akruti every day, forcing her to break the relationship with me. She was handling it good, until last night, when he had come home drunk and ran into an argument with Akruti. On refusing to agree to his terms, he started slapping her.'

'What? This is ridiculous. Is this how much he cares and feels about the girl? He doesn't even care about her feeling and he says that he cares about her future. This is truly not acceptable. How can he physically torture her? How come Akash is not even aware of such a big situation?' said I.

'He knows now, as he was the one to stop Arpit while he was manhandling Akruti.'

'What did he do after that?'

'I am not sure, she just said that situation is getting worse now and her dad is tensed,' said he.

I knew that Akash is a heart patient, so I asked, 'I suppose Akash is a heart patient, he should be kept out of it.'

My son replied saying, 'Yes dad, that is the problem. Akash uncle is tensed and got his blood pressure increased already.' My son was just saying these words and his phone rang.

'It is Akruti,' he said, before picking the call. I thought of having water in a meanwhile, so I went to the kitchen to take up the water to drink. When I came out, my son said, 'Dad, Akash uncle had a severe heart attack, before he was rushed to the hospital. He is been treated now.' I was left speechless.

We went to Delhi, the next flight. We went straight to the hospital to realise that Akash was doing well. He was said to be on rest for few more days. It was the second time he had got this attack, so his family was prepared to keep things under control. We spoke to him and Akruti, we did not even take out the topic on Arpit's behaviour. We stayed

there for a night as we had a flight back home, the next morning. On that night, my son spoke to Akruti about the situation and tried to console her, by giving her the confidence that he would handle the situation, asked her not to worry and things would be fine soon. I did not even see Arpit anywhere near his brother, when he needed him the most. He did not even bother to come and have a look at his brother's healthiness in the hospital.

Next morning, we came back home. In few days, Akash was discharged, after getting fit and fine. He was at rest for some days at home and the matter of Arpit was still being neglected, but it could not have been for long.

One day, I got a call from Akash. He was acting very diplomatic. He said, 'Look Rajaram, I respect you and your thoughts. Your son is the best person I can ever get my daughter married to, but it is not just me who decides whom my daughter should get married to, it is also many other people who have this responsibility and as you know, most of them are not supporting me in this thought.'

I was getting irritated with his words and it was very annoying. I was not able to understand the kind of love and respect this guy had for his brother, so I stopped him in between and said, 'What do you mean by the responsibility of the other people? It is you, as she is your daughter, who decided who will she marry and moreover, it is your daughter, who decides whom she want to marry. Isn't it?'

'I know that, but as elders, it is also our duty to see who is good and who is bad for our daughter,' said he.

'We were very good for your daughter earlier and now suddenly, you feel that we are not capable enough to become your relatives?'

He was silent for a sec and I continued, 'Look Akash, I know that these are not your words. Please stop acting diplomatic and just be practical to accept the fact that Arpit is not at all happy with me and you don't want to go against him.'

Akash said, 'I want to go against him, but I know him very well, he will not let things happen very easily. He will go to the cheapest level to get things done his way. So it is better we follow what he says and move on.'

‘Ok, I don’t have problem taking dowry, I will ask my son to accept the amount you want to give and will also ask him to return the amount to you, if he is feeling guilty for taking dowry. Is that ok with you?’

He said, ‘Thanks!! It gave me a big relief. I will tell this to Arpit and let us solve this issue here itself.’

I asked my son to keep his ethics aside for some time, accept the fact that we are poor and listen to Arpit’s words. I also explained him about the situation Akash is in and told him about my conversation with Akash. My son was sensible enough to understand the situation, as love was more important for him than his ethics and ego.

Few days later, I again got a call from Akash. He was acting diplomatic again, but this time the situation was worse. Akash said, ‘Arpit has decided that he doesn’t want Akruti to get married to Harish.’

‘What have you decided?’

‘I am left with no option. I don’t know how I can handle him, if I go against him.’

I was pissed off with his words, he was sounding like a coward, who does not have guts to fight for his rights. ‘I will speak with Arpit.’

‘Please try to convince him and don’t get into any kind of argument. I request you on that. He may be annoying you, or hurting your ego, but please don’t argue with him. He is literally a psychopath.’

‘I will try my best,’ said I, before hanging up the phone.

I told Harish about my conversation with Akash and asked him not to worry about the situation. I told my son that I would call Arpit and solve the issue, on which my son said, ‘Dad, thank you!!’

‘What?’

‘Thanks for keeping your ego aside and having such patience, just to settle my family. You are the best dad one could ever get.’

‘Son, don’t get emotional. Keeping their kids happy is the only thing a person prays for and stop being emotional, as it is the time to be serious and handle the situation carefully.’

Sometime later, I called up Arpit to have a word and I was ready to accept anything he wanted me to do. I said, ‘Arpit, I am ready to accept anything you want me to do, just forget about the past and move on.’

He laughed, as if a comedy series was going on, and said, 'Aab aa gaye na line par, I told you so many times to listen to my words. I begged you to take dowry, just listen to my words and accept the fact, but you never listened to me. This is not the way you make relationships. I am completely against love marriages, but I still accepted the proposal. Giving my daughter to your son is like lowering my standards in the society. I have a reputation, I have a standard, what do you have? Your existence is almost equal to nothing.'

I interrupted him, controlling my anger, saying, 'Arpit!! Please understand the situation. There is no point debating about who is better than whom, or whose status is high. The situation demands to be calm, forget about the past and make a new start. So let us concentrate on that.'

'Why should I listen to you now? And more over, I have selected a guy for Akruiti, no need of you worrying about her anymore.'

'Listen Arpit, there is no use of you getting angry. We are just spoiling our kid's future and doing nothing else. Let us please forget the past and move on,' said I.

'It is not possible, ask your son to speak to me. It was him who intended to marry Akruiti, let us see how far he will go, to get her,' said he.

I just did not want to worsen the situation by saying something wrong, so I said, 'Ok, I will ask my son to give you a call.'

Soon after that, I called Harish and told about my conversation, for which my son was totally pissed off. He shouted on me for so resistant and not saying anything. I said, 'Son, aggression is not the solution for anything. I have told you earlier and I am telling you now as well, patience is the key in these kinds of situations. Just calm down and think wisely, just don't take any decision in aggression, as it will always be wrong.' I told him to speak to Arpit and try the best to solve the situation, peacefully.

After two hours I got a call from my son. I asked about the result of the conversation, for which he answered, 'Dad!! I think it is better that I forget Akruiti.'

'Are you kidding me, how can you even think of that. Just say me what happened in the call?'

'Arpit wants me to be with them after marriage. He wants me to be a Ghar jamai and the worst part is that he wants me to leave you and mom, just because you guys are less educated, poor and have a low standard of living.'

I laughed and said, 'So, what have you decided?'

'I will forget her.'

'Are you a fool, how can you forget a girl just because you were not able to get her? Think about Akruti, will she be able to forget you? Do you think the decision is wise enough? You are now thinking of forgetting her, but how will you lead your life with the feeling that you are a loser, who couldn't even marry the girl he loved the most, even after the girl loved him. It is not easy, son.'

'So, what do you want me to do dad?'

'I told you many times, you won't get anything easily in life, you have to fight for each and every thing you want, in your life. Or there is also one more option, just compromise.'

'I cannot compromise dad. I can't leave you nor can I leave her,' said he.

'Good!!' said I. He was silent for few seconds and I said, 'Come on son, don't be a coward. Be a strong man. This is not how I have raised you. Fight and get what you want in your life, never have the fear of defeat.'

Next day, my son called and said, 'I have come to a decision.'

'What is that?'

He said, 'I will try my best to convince Arpit, if it is not possible, I will raise a complaint against him.'

'Are you sure of what you are saying?'

'Yes.'

I said, 'Better try the first option, it looks handier.'

'I will try my best, but I have already lost hopes and patience.'

'Give it a try,' said I.

After trying for two days, my son, called me up and said, 'Dad, we are just three weeks away from the marriage date. I tried my best to convince Arpit, but he isn't ready to understand and moreover he has

also kept Akruti out of my reach. He has disconnected her phone and locked her in a room. I am going to the police to complain against this.'

'Against what?' I asked.

'For locking Akruti in the room.'

I laughed at him and said, 'She is his daughter, it is his wish and he can do whatever he wants to . You are in Mumbai, she is in Delhi. If the police inspector asks that how do you know if she is locked? What answer do you have?' he was quiet for some time and I continued, 'Raise a case of dowry against Arpit.' My son, in a shocking voice said, 'How can I raise a complaint for dowry against him'

'In [Act No.63 of 1984, sec.3 (1)] which is against giving and taking dowry?'

'But I have not taken dowry,' said my son.

'You were offered, right? That is more than sufficient for bringing him back to senses and I feel this would just give a warning to him.'

Next day, my son raised a complaint against Arpit, in Mumbai police station. Within few hours Arpit came to know about it and he in return raised a complaint against my son for attempt to murder on Akruti, which we were unaware of; until, he received a notice. He was in deep shock when he learnt about it, how a person can try to kill his own love! But, as an Indian, you should be knowing that no one in this country believes that a guy can raise a complaint for being offered dowry, especially when there is also a case raised against him for attempt to murder. Same thing occurred with my son, he was not even asked if he ever visited Delhi to try and kill the girl. It may also, very well, be the money effects, which was provided by Arpit to go against my son. Now I realise the real fact that money is very important in life and it is the only thing which is important in life. I earned respect, but that didn't help me prevent my son from going to jail.

Rajaram Singh, almost got tears in his eyes saying these words. I could not say anything to him. It was the first time in my life as an advocate that I was feeling guilty for not going into the depth to investigate the issue. I always assumed that the cases involving money had the greedy people involved, but Rajaram proved me wrong. I said, 'Rajaram, don't worry!! I will try my best not to let your earned respect go in vain.'

Rajaram laughed at my words and said, 'I know that I am not wrong, in the way I think and don't worry!! I am not going to change my way of thinking. I am very stubborn and I know that my son has not done anything wrong. I am proud of my son. Doesn't matter he is in jail, but I am happy that he has not followed the trend set by the losers of today's world.'

I smiled, looking at Rajaram. I was impressed with his stubbornness, self-belief and the positiveness, different or can say the correct kind of approach, towards life and the way to lead it. I asked him, 'What happened after that? I mean to the case.'

'Kya hona tha? As soon as my son realised that Arpit has raised a complaint against him, he went straight to the police station in Mumbai, but he couldn't explain anything to them, nor was he able to make a fast progress in the case. Whereas Arpit made a fast move and made things move quicker in the court. My son ran for help, everywhere he could have. He knew that he was not wrong, but he also knew that the world around him wouldn't believe his words. He was disturbed, not just because of the case against him, but also because of the fact that things have moved a long way in a sad path. He thought that he would marry Akruti very easily, but things had taken a different turn. He hadn't spoken to Akruti for weeks, which made him get more depressed and unstable. He went to Delhi, to meet Akruti, but he was stopped and beaten up by Arpit's people. He returned, with no option but to fight the case. He went to the police station for help, but they said it would take some time for the investigation to start and told him not to worry as things will be controlled soon.

One day, the same Mumbai police came to him with an arrest warrant, which stated that he should be in custody till the case against him is not solved. I went to Mumbai, as soon as I learnt this from my son. I bailed him, but he was already shattered. He had lost hopes that he would get Akruti back in his life, he wanted a peaceful living. He was internally destroyed, he was not speaking much, he was not eating much and he just said one thing. 'I want to be in jail. I can't face this cruel world again. I just want to be away from this world.' I saw that he was badly beaten up by the police in just a night time, as a point of investigation. I held my nerves and told him, 'Don't fight for yourself, have a broad way of thinking now, fight for this country. Change the fucking way this country-people think. Be strong, you have nothing to lose now. You have my support, don't take a step back. Go to the extreme. You know

that you are correct, but don't let people's way of thinking hamper you. You may find many difficulties in between, but never lose hope.' My son is a sport person, so I knew that he always had a positive attitude going on with him. He looked at me with aggression, which I had not seen in him in years. It was the same aggression which he had, when failed to score good in a match and wanted to desperately score in the next match, when he was a kid.

'Thanks dad!! You go home now, I will handle the situation from here. I need some peace of mind to think.'

I came home the next night. After few days, he called me up and said, 'Dad, I may have to go to the jail. Tomorrow is my first hearing and I want you to be there.'

'Son, it is just the first hearing; it will take many hearings more to get the result. Don't worry, just chill. I will be there with you.'

My son, having a pause for few seconds, said, 'Dad, I am accepting the mistake in court tomorrow. I will say that I have tried to kill Akruti.'

'Are you a fool, why do you want to do that?'

'Dad, it is you, who has asked me to change this system. I have taken up the challenge that I will stop dowry in this country and I will do it for sure.'

'How will you do it by accepting that you are the one to demand for dowry?' asked I.

'I have found my guy dad!! He will do it for us.'

I did not understand anything. I asked, 'What do you mean?'

'I have found an advocate, who is very experienced and also has a hundred per cent win record, but the problem is, he is fighting the case against me.'

I laughed and said, 'Looks like you have lost hopes of winning against that guy, so you want to quit.'

'No dad, I am just diverting his mind to my side. I think I have learnt him very well and according to me, he should support my moves after the case is closed. If there is anyone who would help us change the way this country thinks, its him.'

'Son, don't be so confident about anything or anyone. You will be spoiling your life if he doesn't turn up,' said I.

'I know dad, but I don't have any other option left.'

'Son, you are taking a wrong step. Just take a time out and find some other way.'

'Ok dad, I will see if I can find some other way.'

On the case day, he said that he has not got any plan yet, but he wants to somehow finish today's hearing and postpone the case saying I would need more time. He was expecting that Akruti would support him, but on the case day, she went against him. She said that, 'Harish had tried to kill him,' which was not correct at all. This shattered my son. He was not expecting these words from Akruti. He could not believe that his own love was going against him. So, he accepted the crime and followed plan one. He sacrificed his love and his dreams and took up the challenge to change the approach this country people have, with your help.

I was surprised to hear these words from Rajaram. I asked him, 'Am I that advocate?' Rajaram replied with a smile on his face, 'Yes, I couldn't believe that my son's prediction would be so accurate. Maybe you are the only person he believed that would understand him.' I was not sure, if I had to feel proud or feel trapped.

Rajaram continued saying, 'I told him (son) that he was taking a high risk and you, being an advocate, may not even bother about his case, that too when fighting against him, but he was correct, you turned up.' I was taken by a surprise; I did not know what to say and how to react. Rajaram then called his wife for tea, it was 8 p.m. and looked at me, with a smile. I replied with a smile. I desperately needed a fag, that too after listening to what Rajaram had just said. I went out, it was dark below the tree, and I went there with a fag in my hand. I heard Rajaram Singh's sound, 'Come here, we will have together. We will go upstairs.' I turned around to see that Rajaram was lighting up his fag.

'You smoke too?' I asked.

'Yes, I occasionally do.'

'Doesn't look like, from your style of holding a fag.'

He laughed and replied, 'I was a chain smoker once; it is my son who made me quit this. Now I just do it once in a blue moon.'

'Tea is ready,' sound from downstairs, it was Rajaram's wife. Rajaram went down and bought tea for us. We were having tea and he asked, 'You don't have kids?' I was shocked with his question. How can someone directly ask that? I said, "No, I don't have any, but how did you know? Your son investigated that as well?'

He laughed and said, 'Calm down, just that you brought your wife with you. I got this doubt. Didn't have it, or?' He continued.

'Was about to have one, but due to miscarriage lost it and Harika's health wasn't good after that, so we decided not to have any.'

'Harika!! Nice name,' said he. I smiled.

We finished the fag and went downstairs where I could smell cauliflowers cooking, it was my favourite vegetable. I asked, 'Is it cauliflowers being cooked?' Rajaram said, 'Yes, it is cauliflower, but you are not invited to the dinner, unless you bring your wife here.'

I smiled and said, 'No worries, I was just checking for it, as I love cauliflower.'

'Go and pick your wife, she had come with you for a trip. Please give her some time as well.'

'Any good restaurant nearby SLV?'

'I told you to bring her here, my house is the best restaurant and my wife is the best cook, you would find in this city.'

'I will bring my wife.'

'Do you need my company? You may forget the lane you came through.'

'I don't mind it,' I said.

We went to the hotel, picked my wife and came back to Rajaram Singh's house. We had the most delicious dinner, made by his wife. My wife and his wife were very busy chit chatting, exchanging recipes. Whereas we were busy exchanging the flaws in our own work cultures. After having a nice stay, we went back to our hotel. I had finished the work I had come for. I went to the hotel room, along with my wife, with a peaceful mind and clear head. I felt like I have achieved something after a long time.

My wife changed her dress and was about to sleep, she kissed me and said, 'I hope you will sleep peacefully from today.' I smiled at her and said, 'I hope the same.' She rolling her hands on my head, playing with

my hair and giving me a naughty look, rolled me on my bed. She was sitting on me, stretching my hands on the bed, came close to me, with almost planting a kiss on my lips, said, 'How about plans of taking out your exhaustion?' I smiled at her, said, 'I would love to do that' and kissed her. It had been long since we had made out. We had the most satisfying sex ever, before going to sleep.

Next day, early in the morning, my wife woke me up for coffee. It was 11 a.m. I had a pleasant sleep after a long time. Maybe because I had realised that Harish was not guilty, or maybe because I have got the most interesting, challenging and most valuable case, I ever wanted, or even maybe because I had the best sex last night. Whatever maybe the reason for my pleasant sleep, I was happy and relaxed. My wife gave me coffee and said, 'Wake up now!! We have to leave early, so that we reach home by midnight.' I was still feeling drowsy. I said, 'Don't worry!! I will drive fast if required.'

She came close to me and pulling my hand, said, 'No need to showcase your driving talent. Just get up and get going.'

I, after having the coffee, freshened up and got ready to leave for Mumbai. We were about to leave and I got a call from Rajaram. He asked me to visit his home for few sweets prepared by his wife, before leaving for Mumbai. I went to his house, picked the sweets and left for Mumbai. Just before leaving for Mumbai, Rajaram said, 'Please help my son, help him in a big cause.' I smiled and left for Mumbai.

On our way, my wife asked me, 'These people are very good in nature. I had never seen anyone with such a friendly and helping nature ever in my life. I sometimes feel, living in such a big city, we have stopped caring about people in our neighbourhood, but look at these people, they barely know us and they have helped us so much.'

'It doesn't depend upon the place where you leave, but it just depends on the kind of person you are.'

She, giving me an angry look, said, 'Does it mean that I am not a good person?'

I did not know what to say. I, trying to be diplomatic, said, 'I didn't mean that, I just meant that those people are better than us.'

She smiled at me and said, 'I forgot that you are an advocate, how can I beat you in words.' We chit chatted for some time, before my wife fell asleep. It was like pin drop silence after that.

I was driving the lonely road and all sorts of thoughts were popping in my head. I was very impressed with the Rajaram Singh and his son's way of thinking. I was just thinking about Harish and was feeling sad for him. What was he expecting from life and what has he got. He thought of marrying the girl he loved, but ended up in jail, for all wrong reasons. By the time I finished my journey, I also got the feeling that both Rajaram Singh and Harish, were very smart people, doesn't matter where they belong to, they had the ability to play with people's mind, as they did to me. So, I was wondering if they were still playing with my mind, by not telling the truth. Maybe they are still trapping me deep into their play. I started doubting these people.

We reached home, late night; though my wife had a sleep throughout the journey, she was tired and needed a deeper sleep. She went in, planting a kiss on my cheek and slept. Though speaking to Rajaram had cleared most of my doubts, I was not sure if I could trust him. I was back in confusion, if he was telling the truth or was he just playing with me. I sat down with a bottle of wine the whole night, but could not decide if he was trustable or not, I knew that I was tired and this was not the right time to think about deciding on anything, as whatever I decide now, will always be wrong and I will surely change my decision in the morning. But, the thoughts were going at the back of my mind. It was the first time someone had played with my mind, and has been successful. I was not able to accept the fact that someone, who does not even know me, has played with me.

I spent few hours of that night with this sad feeling that I was toyed by some other person, but I fell asleep soon and everything was alright by morning.

Next morning, my secretary saw me absorbed in thoughts and asked, 'Looks like meeting the Harish's family has increased your confusion!'

'No, but yes, meeting Rajaram, Harish's dad, has solved one of my worries and increased a few of them. I am not sure if I have to believe him or not.'

My secretary looked at me and said, 'We don't have any other case, as we are more interested in this case and that day is not far, when people won't even prefer giving their case to us.'

'When we don't have any case, why don't we just follow up on this case and end it up,' said I, with a naughty smile.

I knew that she was very upset with me for following the dead case, though she was interested in knowing the facts of this case, but she always meant business.

'Case is closed long back, if you remember.'

I looked down and slowly looking at her, and said, 'Second case is closed, but the first one still exists.'

She gave me a surprising look and said, 'Which is the first case now?'

'Case for offering dowry, it was raised by Harish against Arpit.'

She, laughing at me, said, 'Are you kidding me!!! Can we book a case of that sort? Why will someone complain for offering money.'

'There can be only one person who can do that and that is HarishChandra. I feel that he considers himself to be The King Satya Harishchandra to do all these things.'

'Are you serious?' asked my secretary.

I could see that this story was gaining her interest. She then asked, 'What is the issue with the case then, why isn't it being solved?' I explained her the whole story, in detail. She, after listening to the story, was very curious to meet Harish.

'The story is good, but it lacks trust, from my end at least.'

'Whaaattttt!!! What else do you need, to trust on this story? The guy is so innocent and so true, but still in jail and you won't trust him. I think you won't trust him just because he made you follow his path,' said she.

'Let me have his background checked. What do you say?'

'Not a bad option at all.'

'Just get me any details of him, if you can. Get me his relatives this time. Let us speak to them about his nature,' said I.

After some investigation, I got the details of his first cousin, Vikram, a married guy with one kid. He lived in Bangalore. I spoke to Vikram over the phone and confirmed if he is available for next week. I did not tell him the reason for the visit, as I wanted to know the truth which may get manipulated if had I tell him that I wanted to have a word about his cousin.

Unpredictable Harish

I went to Bangalore, met Vikram, who looked a very decent guy, very professional. After introducing each other, we went to a restaurant, where he asked me, 'How can I help you?'

'I want to know few things about your brother, Harish.' He gave me a weird look, as if he was frustrated with people asking about Harish.

'I expected so!! I am feeling ashamed to say that he is my cousin. Yes, what do you want from me?'

I was shocked to listen this from Vikram. I was expecting sympathy from him, being a cousin of Harish. 'Never mind,' I said to myself and asked Vikram, 'I want to know what kind of person he was. I mean, you have seen him from his childhood, I want to know the kind of person he was and he is now.'

'He was a very sensible and little dumb, when he was a kid. He loved playing cricket. He had a dream to become an international cricketer, but financial conditions of his family were not so good, so he had to be practical and move out of cricket field.'

'How did he take this? I mean the shattering of his dreams of not being able to play for India.'

'I don't know much, we were not in joint family, but he never mentioned anything of the sort that he missed cricket in his life. He got matured pretty early, as he grew up. He was a dumb ass, when he was in primary, but got his maturity level increased as soon as he joined cricket club for practice, in his higher primary,' said Vikram.

'What happened after that? Did he continue his studies?'

'Yes, he did, he very well did. He studied in very good college, got the placement done and more over was working very good; until this tragedy happened.'

'Hmmm, did you ever feel that he was greedy, or wanted to earn more money?'

'I am not sure, as I have been out of touch with him for quite some time now,' said Vikram. I was getting the positive answers for everything I asked, but I did not know the reason for him being so upset about

Harish earlier. So, I asked, 'Are you upset with what he has done? Or do you feel that he has done that crime?'

'He has accepted his mistake, didn't he? I am not sure if he has really attempted to kill that girl or has he accepted the mistake just not to harm the girl he loved. I can't say anything.'

'Did he ever cheat or betray anyone for money?' I was asking these questions just in order to know if Harish was really not interested in money or was it just a story made up by his father.

'Not up to my knowledge. He was very self-respected and ethical human. He was very clear with his ideas, but yes, sometime unpredictable too.'

'Unpredictable? What do you mean by that?'

He laughed and said, 'He is unpredictable sometimes. Once I was with him in counselling of the colleges, even after saying so many times by me not to select some college, he selected the college he wanted. Never thought about the financial conditions, nor he thought about his parents' demand.'

'Can you start from the beginning, I am fond of listening to stories nowadays,' I laughed saying this. He smiled too.

Vikram continued, 'As I said he and I were from poor background. Our parents have struggled a lot to bring us up to this level, what we are today. It was a time, when I was doing my engineering, at one of the good college in Raichur. I was in my final year and Harish was about to finish his 12th and join his bachelor's degree. He had quit cricket by then and studied hard to get good marks in his 12th, but he didn't score good in CET (Common Entrance Test), whose rating is used for getting into engineering and medical colleges in Karnataka.

Once he was done with all the exams and results, it was the time for counselling (Selecting the college based on merit). His Dad, Mr Rajaram Singh, before we headed to counselling, had told us to prefer the same college in which I had finished my engineering, but Harish's demand was something else. He wanted to be out of the city, as that college didn't have had very good placements. As his rank in CET was not so good, I was sure that he wouldn't get any of the good colleges, at least in mechanical branch. We went through the counselling and saw some good colleges having vacant seats in Mechanical department, but his

dad had strictly instructed not to prefer any other college apart from the college I had studied in, so we selected the same college.

I took him to the college as soon as we went back home. I was very much excited that my cousin will be studying in the same college, in which I finished my engineering. I took him to each and every department, introduced him to all the staff members, took him to the hostel and introduced him to my friends and juniors, who were about to be his seniors. I had earned respect in that college, which would have helped him in enjoying his life. We paid the token amount and came back to home, I explained my uncle that doesn't matter which college you study as at the end everyone would land up in the same company. My uncle agreed with me and so did Harish, as I thought so.

After few days, one of my juniors, Sameer, who was the cricket captain of my college, came to me and said, 'I heard that Harish has joined our college?'

'Yes, how do you know him?'

'We played cricket together, he is a very good cricketer,' said Sameer.

I smiled and said, 'I know that,' though I had never seen him play cricket, I had heard it from many people that he played really well.

'I want him to play for our college in the inter-college tournament.'

'When is it starting?' I asked.

'It has already started and we are into the semi-final, which is tomorrow,' said Sameer.

'I will inform him to be in the ground tomorrow morning.'

I went straight to Harish's house after the college and told him to get ready for the match. He was excited too, as he had not played a match since 7 to 8 months. He had even donated his bat to someone; therefore, we went to that person and took back his bat.

Next morning, most of the people in the ground and opposite team were little traumatised to see him in the ground. Sameer was already aware that the opposition team may have objection, on playing Harish in the team, so he had informed me to bring the receipt for admission, but I had forgot to inform Harish about the same. The issue came, when the opposition objected for having Harish in the team. Harish was unaware of the issue, as he was busy practicing. Sameer asked me if I

had brought the receipt. I told him that I forgot to inform Harish about it and said I would bring it from his house. I was about to leave for Harish's house and we were joined by Harish. Harish asked, 'Wassup..??'

'Praveen, the opposition captain, is asking for the proof that you have joined the college,' said Sameer.

'Where is the organiser?' Harish asked.

Sameer called the organiser and we were soon joined by the organiser and Praveen. Harish said, 'Listen Praveen, do you have any issue with me playing in the team?' for which the organiser asked, 'Have you joined the college?'

'Yes I have, but I haven't brought the receipt for that.'

The organiser said, 'I believe you Harish and I believe you too, but. . .' saying this the organiser looked towards Praveen. Praveen said, 'I believe you dude,' saying this, Praveen looked at Sameer and said, 'It is ok, I don't have any problem playing with him.'

'Thank you,' said Sameer with a smile on his face.

Praveen shaking his hands with Sameer said, 'You have already played your jack dude.'

Praveen shaking his hand with Harish, said, 'Bachoon ko baksh de. Hope you are out of form.'

Harish gave a big laugh and said, 'Bacha to mai hoon. Don't worry!! It has been more than 8 months since I have touched my bat.'

I was surprised to see this, Sameer was the most popular person in my college, most of them respected him, including me, but here was my four years younger cousin. He was respected by each and every person on the ground. Being at home, I never realised that he was such a good player. I got more excited to see the match.

Sameer went for the toss, won it and chose to field first. Harish had gained fat and was out of touch for long to be fit. He was getting heavy breath while fielding. He was bad on field, but still much better than the other players in the team. The match was of twenty overs, which had no relation with T20 match played now, as it was not even introduced then. He bowled four overs and took two crucial wickets. We had a target of 145 runs which was not so tough with the kind of batting line up we

had. Most of them had played professional cricket earlier, so the target was very much achievable.

We had a break for twenty minutes before getting started. Our opening batsmen were said to have performed well in the series so far. So we were confident and excited to start the chase. The game started, it was the first ball and we lost a wicket. Sameer was the next batsman to go in. He stayed there and saw three more wickets fall down. I was looking at him and he was not confident at letting Harish go in. I was not able to see the disaster from outside. Next over Sameer got out as well. The whole team in the pavilion had lost hopes. We were 34 for 5 in the sixth over. I saw Harish look at Sameer, angrily. Sameer then asked Harish to get padded up. We lost one more wicket after two balls with same score on the board. It was a drinks break and Pankaj, the man at the non-stricker's end, came close to the pavilion for drinks. Harish went in, said hello to Pankaj who was having drinks. He had never seen him play, he had not met him too, as Pankaj was an unprofessional cricketer. Pankaj looked to have lost hopes. Harish asked him, 'Do you believe that we can win this match?' Pankaj said, 'I don't know.' Pankaj was in the final year of engineering, four years elder to Harish and Harish told him, 'We can win this match, you just give me the support until you gain confidence.' Pankaj said, 'Ok.' The drinks break was over and they went in to the ground. The only hope for the team was Harish. They played singles for some overs and then accelerated. Harish started scoring in boundaries and soon Pankaj followed him. They were scoring at a steady rate. Harish scored 50 and Pankaj was in his 30s. It was 4 in the evening and the crowd slowly build up. Harish and Pankaj were exhausted in the heat. It was a time when we needed ball to ball runs. We needed 14 of 13 balls. Pankaj played the ball in square region and they completed 2 runs and Harish asked Pankaj for the third, he obliged even though he was finding it difficult to reach, so he failed to reach and was run out. We lost 7th wicket and needed 12 runs to win. We lost two more wickets in the next over, but scored 4 runs. 8 runs were needed of the last 6 balls and Harish was at the crease. Raja was the bowler. He was Harish's school teammate. He had played Raja before. Raja was a slow medium pace bowler. Harish defended the first ball, he was cool, as he had the confidence that he would score it easily. Sameer walked in and told Harish not to give strike to the player opposite to him. Harish started getting tensed now. Whole of my college crowd was present, was cheering for Harish, with some local crowd who knew him. He was feeling the pressure. Next two balls he stepped out and got beaten.

He had 3 balls to score 8 runs. He scored 2 each of next 2 balls and leaving us with, 4 runs to win and 3 runs to draw, of the last ball. It was the last ball. He had no other option but to go for it. He smashed the ball, it went to the outfield. He took 2 runs and we lost the match by 1 run. The whole crowd was not able to believe it; I was not able to believe it. Harish threw his bat and sat down with tears in his eyes. I saw the crowd running in. I went to Harish and said, 'Well played man, you are the star,' whereas he was very much disappointed with the loss. All efforts that he and Pankaj had put has gone in vain. He had everything in his hand and he lost it. I saw everyone from both the teams walk towards him and congratulate for the performance he had put in, but instead of being happy, he was upset that he had lost the match. He had become a star in front of my college crowd, even before joining the college.

Next day, in college, most of them came to me and asked if Harish was my cousin and appreciated his efforts. I was feeling proud to say that he was my cousin and he would be joining the same college soon. I saw that he already had many fans, before joining the college. Though we had lost the match, everyone just spoke about the kind of innings he played. Everyone loved his batting style and said that he would become a star soon. I was happy for him. He had made me proud.

One day I had been to Harish's place. I was praising his cricket skills and told his mom the whole story of the match day. I also told her about the fan following he has got in the college after the match performance, his mom was happy and excited by my words. She was happy to know that her son was such a good talent and people appreciated it too, but Harish looked least interested in my words. . . Harish, nodding his head, said, 'I want to be out of this district, I don't want to study in this college.'

I was unaware of the situation; I was surprised with his words. I asked him, 'You don't want to study in my college?'

'No, I don't. I can get a better college in Bangalore. I want to be out of this place.'

I said, 'That's fine, but you won't find any good college in Bangalore now. There are fifty-four colleges in Bangalore. Most of the colleges don't even have a proper roof top, many colleges run with single building. My college is much better than them all.'

'Let me go for counselling.'

'Don't act foolish in the counselling hall.'

'I won't,' said he.

I wasn't sure what was wrong with this guy, he had earned such a good respect, which people die to get, from the people in the college and he wanted to change the college. I thought that he was not realising the fact that respect can't be earned easily. I thought that he was acting childish.

We were in the middle of a discussion and my uncle entered into the house, 'What is going on?'

'He is not interested in pursuing his engineering in my college,' said I.

Harish looked at me, looked at his dad and kept his head down. My aunt then said, 'Why are you forcing him if he is not interested? Let him go wherever he likes to.'

My uncle said, 'Even I want to see him happy, but I am restricted. I don't have sufficient money for his engineering.'

Harish said, 'We can take a loan.'

My uncle looked at Harish, with anger and said, 'We have to take a loan, but staying outside also means an additional expense every month.'

'It's not impossible. We can do it. I will work outside and study, I can take care of my expense,' said Harish. For which I replied, 'Are you mad, be practical, engineering is not a cake walk. You need to work hard. How will you study if you work?'

'I will manage everything.' My uncle put his head down and went inside, got freshen up and while having his dinner said, 'Go, take a good college if you get any.' Harish looked at his mom and smiled. He was excited to be studying in the college he wanted. He was excited to get what he actually wanted. I was happy for him and hoping that he would get a good college in casual vacancy round.

I finished my college soon and came to Bangalore for search of job. One day, I got a call from Harish saying that he has received the dates for casual vacancy and he would be coming to Bangalore soon. He came to Bangalore and stayed with Sandy, our other cousin. Sandy was studying in MSRIT, one of the best colleges in Karnataka. We met for dinner the same day Harish came to Bangalore. We were joined by Sandy's two

other friends, Sunny and Dinesh. While having dinner, Dinesh asked Harish, 'What is your rank?' '22412,' Harish replied.

'Which colleges are you trying for?' Dinesh asked.

Harish had no idea about the colleges. He asked Dinesh, 'Which colleges you feel I may get now and which colleges should I look for, according to you?'

'Depends on the branch you want to select.'

I said, 'He is looking for mechanical.'

Dinesh made a sad face and said, 'You may have very less options then.'

I said, 'I know.'

Harish asked Dinesh, 'Which is your branch?'

He said, 'Chemical.' He asked him again, as he had never heard of any branch by that name before. He again said, 'Chemical' with smiles on his face, as even Dinesh knew that not many people knew about chemical and very less people were interested in it. I was feeling proud sitting there with Mechanical branch, does not matter from not so good college, I at least had a good branch, which mattered the most.

I smiled at Dinesh and asked, 'Are you serious, I haven't heard of any branch by that name.'

'Yes, I know most of the people don't know about this branch.'

I then started investigating about the branch. He said all positives and not a single negative point about the branch. Suddenly, Sunny said, 'Sab goli de raha hai, don't believe him. Ghatiya branch hai.'

Dinesh replied saying, 'Tu Daru pee, don't bother about our discussion. Aise bhi tujhe kuch samaj nahi aega.'

We all laughed, as both of them started pulling each other's legs. Then, Harish asked Sandy, as he admired him the most, 'Which branch should I choose?'

Sandy looked down, with a mug of beer in his hand, thought for some time, looked up and said, 'I think you should better go for the college in which Vikram studied, as it would be cheap and you would be close to home.' I was not expecting this answer from Sandy, but I was happy to

listen this from him. It was the first time, my thoughts were in sync with his.

Next day Harish came to the counselling cell, with sandy and I was joining him in the cell. Sandy with his friends went back and told us to give him a call once done with the counselling. Harish looked very confused. I asked him, 'Wassup?'

'I am left with the confusion of what should I do. Should I take any good college in Bangalore or should I go for the college in which you finished studying. There is no one on my side, everyone told me to prefer your college over any other college just because it's close to home and also, college doesn't matter that is what everyone suggested. I am not sure if my way of thinking was correct, but I want to be out of that city.'

I smiled at him and said, 'Don't worry!! We will go inside and check for the colleges available. If we find any good college we take it, or we will stick to our previous college.'

He looked at me and said, 'I am not sure if that would be right.'

We went inside the cell and it had a big screen displaying the college list with seats available in the column having branch name, as a column name and college in the first row. We saw the colleges available for Harish. There were few colleges available with good branch, as not many people had come for the casual vacancy; I felt to have a chance of getting a good college. After two hours of stay we had two people before us and I saw that we had BIT, one of the good colleges, with mechanical Branch, the only college left for Harish to select. Person before us selected BIT. We did not have any college with mechanical branch available. I looked at Harish and said, 'No college with mechanical branch is left. Better to retrieve the same.' He was disappointed and was looking on the screen for any options, I saw that there was a seat available in SIT, Siddaganga Institute Of Technology. When I looked carefully, I realised that only one seat was available and that too in Chemical. We were not in a mood of compromising the branch. Harish looked at me and asked, 'Shall I go for SIT?'

I was confused with his words, I was not sure what should I tell him. He was asking me if he could go for a branch which he had heard just a day ago. I asked him, 'Are you serious, Chemical, you got Mechanical and Raichur is available in front of you.'

He looked down and said, 'Okay, I will go for SSLN.'

'Better!!'

Though he had said that he would take SSLN, the college I studied, his heart was not ready to accept that he would be taking SSLN. Our number was called, we were approaching the counsellor, I looked at Harish and he looked very depressed. We sat on our respective seats and the counsellor asked Harish, 'Which college do you like to select?' I said, 'SSLN, Mechanical.' The counsellor looked at Harish, he said, SIT, Chemical.'

I was shocked, fully surprised, I asked Harish, 'Are you sure?' and looking at the counsellor, I said, 'We want to go for Mechanical, SSLN.' The counsellor said, 'But the student wants to go for SIT.'

Harish, with a confident look on his face, said, 'I want SIT.'

I didn't say anything. I was not sure what should I say to him, did not know how to react. He confirmed the counsellor for SIT, Chemical and the future was fixed. It was no looking back now, even if he wanted to. I was not happy with him at all, he was so unpredictable. It was the most important decision of his life and he changed it in seconds. He was not realising the kind of risk he was up to. It was his future on line and he was playing with it. At the same time, I was also worried that my uncle may scold me for not stopping him, from selecting chemical, which according to me was a total waste of four years in engineering.

We came out of the cell. I was pissed off with him. I made a call to my uncle and told him about the decision, but to my surprise, my uncle was happy. As if Harish has achieved something great. Uncle said, 'That college is good, I know the college.' I was surprised to listen these words from my uncle, but it gave me a big sigh of relief, my fear of uncle being upset for not stopping him from selecting chemical was gone. We went outside the cell and saw Sandy was waiting for us. He was curious to know what happened inside, but excitement turned into anger when I said, 'He took chemical in SIT.' Sandy could not believe it. He asked Harish, 'What made you take that branch, do you have any idea about the branch?'

'I spoke to Dinesh and he said that it's a good branch and I can take it.'

'Dinesh had his own industry. His dad is a businessman and he will join his dad. What will you do, work in petrol bunk. Huh?' He was acting to be tensed, but I knew that he was happy that his dad did not have any

problem with it. 'You don't think that you have done a mistake. Won't you?' I asked Harish.

'To say it frankly, at the corner of the heart, I am not getting the feeling that I have taken any wrong move. I somehow felt that things would be good. I always felt that Chemical in SIT is any day better than doing mechanical in SSLN. I preferred good college over good branch. I know that you guys knew things better than I do. But I followed my heart,' he said it in a very serious way. Looking at him to be worried, Sandy understood that he has selected a college by his own wish and he would not listen to any of us now. Sandy smiled at Harish and said, 'Don't worry, if not anything, you can work at Dinesh's Industry.'

After a chat for some time, I came back to my place and Harish and Sandy went back to Yestwantpur, Sandy's place. Harish returned to home, joined college in some days and thank god that he finished his engineering happily and easily.' Saying this, Vikram took a deep breath, as if he was the one who would have been blamed if Harish had not finished his engineering, or not got the best future. It was clearly visible to me that Vikram was more bothered about his impression on the people around him, but did not really care if Harish's future was in trouble. He never bothered that his cousin maybe in trouble in future, rather he cared that people around him may feel that he has spoilt his future. He was happy that it did not happen.

Listening to Vikram, I had gained respect towards Harish, not because he was unpredictable according to Vikram, but because he was the one, who followed his heart, took important decisions on his own and made sure that he was not wrong in making them. I was in deep thought thinking about Vikram's way of thinking, having my 4th tea and Vikram said, 'Is everything alright Mr Advocate?'

'Yes, indeed,' I said. 'Were you in touch with him, after this incident?' I continued.

'Yes, I was in touch, but not regularly.'

I realised that Vikram might not know much about Harish, after his 12th. So I thought it would be better to visit his college. I asked Vikram, 'Where is the college in which he finished his engineering?' Vikram, looking at me with a smile on his face, he said, 'Looks like you are not satisfied with what I have said.'

I smiled and said, 'No, it is not like that, you have cleared my mind for this guy a bit. I have a little better idea of what kind of person he is.'

'I hope so,' said Vikram.

'And also, I now realise why were you so unsure if he would have attempted to kill, because he is very uncertain according to you.'

'It's in Tumkur.' I looked at him, as if asking a question. 'The college in with Harish finished his engineering,' he said. I took the details from Vikram, to reach the college. I thought of visiting the college the next day. It was good meeting Vikram, I felt better than before about Harish's character. I was trying to know more about him, everyday. I said good bye to Vikram and thanked him for his time. Vikram invited me to his house, but I said I would visit him some other time and said we would booze together if time permits.

Next morning, I took a bus from Bangalore to Tumkur, which is 60 km away from Bangalore. I reached SIT college and met the principal. I said, 'I need the details of the person called Harishchandra,' for which he asked me, 'Which department did he belong to?'

'Chemical.'

He called up his PA and said, 'Take him to the chemical department and make him meet the HOD.' The PA was taking me to the Head of the chemical Department and on the way I saw that the infrastructure of the college was awesome, the college was filled with greenery and it looked beautiful. I went to the Head of the Department and said, 'Hello sir.'

He asked me to have a seat and said, 'How can I help you, sir?'

'I want to have some details of one of your students.'

'Which student?'

'Harishchandra,' for which that lady staff who was in the same room said, 'Hoo Harish, he was the Vice President of this department in 2009. He was a very good guy.' The HOD laughed at her and said, 'He was very naughty too.' He then looked at me and said, 'What is that you want to know about him? He was a very sensible and smart guy. He was a very good leader, he managed people very well. He studied well too. After all, that is what he had come here for.'

He laughed saying this, as if he had cracked a great joke. It took time for me to realise that the kind of jokes vary from the surrounding to surrounding you work in. So I started laughing at his jokes, trying to understand it. I asked, 'Have you taken any classes to him?'

The HOD said, 'Yes I have, he was a good student, can't say brilliant, as he bunked many of my classes for cricket. He was a very good cricketer, as said by most of the people. I have not seen him playing though, so I am not sure,' he laughed again and I realised that I should also laugh, as it was a joke. 'Can I meet the Head of physical Department?' I asked. He laughed again, as I had cracked any joke this time and said, 'There is no head of physical department, as he is the only person in that department. So he is called Physical Director.'

I smiled at him and said, 'Can I meet him?'

'Yes, you can, but I was wondering, why are you investigating about Harish?'

'Because he is in jail currently and I am fighting his case.'

He was shocked to listen this, he asked, 'What did he do?'

'He is in, for attempt to murder.'

He, giving a surprising look, said, 'Strange, he is not at all that kind of a guy, he is the most patient human. Depends on the circumstances in which he has taken these steps' and smiled again.

'He has done it when he was forced to take dowry,' said I.

'It may be true, he was a very obdurate guy. He should have done so. But what is the use of being so faithful, everyone in today's world takes dowry. Why can't he take it?' said the HOD.

I replied with a smile and asked, 'Where can I find the physical director?'

He said the same PA, who had brought me to him, 'Take him to PD.'

'Thank you, sir' and moved out of that room. On my way to PD's room, I thought on HOD's words that everyone takes dowry in today's world. He was so right, does not matter a person is educated or not educated, but he takes dowry. I went to the PD and asked him about Harish, he said, 'He was an awesome person and great athlete. He was the captain of the college cricket team in his final year. He was an awesome guy, with great sportsman spirit, but the problem was, he was always happy with

what he had; he never tried for University selection. He should have played for the university the moment he stepped in for selections, but he never did. Nobody knew the reason behind that, maybe he was not interested in playing for university, or maybe he was afraid that he would be distracted from studies if he concentrate on cricket.'

I asked the PD, 'Has he achieved anything for the college?'

'Yes he did. He was the star cricketer of his time.'

I smiled and said, 'Thanks for the help.'

Then the PD, finally asked me, 'Why are you looking for his details?'

I just smiled and said, 'I am one of his fans, sir.' I didn't want to change the impression he had for Harish, so I just lied to him.

I was now gaining some confidence on Harish. I have not heard any single wrong thing about him yet. He looked to be matured from his childhood, or can say, more conscious about his future. Maybe the financial conditions at home had made him more matured at a very early age.

I came back to Mumbai. Met my secretary and told her about the feedback I received from all. My secretary was surprised to know that Harish was a vice president of the department and also the captain of the cricket team. She was not expecting Harish to be such a talent, but he was, as I knew that only a person with good leadership qualities can take such a brave decision and have such a good way of thinking. I said my secretary, 'Call the jail warden and fix the appointment. I have to discuss few things with him. I may have to visit very frequently from now on.'

'Looks like we have an interesting case coming up, finally.'

'What do you mean by that?' I asked.

She smiled at me and said, 'I have never seen you so excited. You fought so many cases just with the intension that you have to fight them, just as you have a job to do, but for this case, you are totally different. You are visiting people, learning the case by your own and more than that, I can see that you want to win this case.'

'I think you are in love with me.'

'Why?'

'You feel jealous that I am not giving time to you.'

She smiled and said, 'I know that you love me and you won't leave me for a guy at least. I have that much of trust on you.'

'Hooo. . . Thanks for at least trusting me in that,' said I. She smiled and then continued with her work.

I had an appointment, next day, with the jail warden. I reached the jail and asked him, 'I am reopening the case of Harish, due to which I may have to visit him more often. I need to have your permission for the same.'

The warden said, 'May I know the reason as to why you are, being such a good advocate, are so much interested in this guy? Is he your relative?'

'No, but I am the one who has put him in here and I have realised that he is innocent, so I want to get him out of here.'

The warden gave me an angry look and said, 'So you feel that you are the person, who decides that who is innocent and who is not? You mean to say that you are the person who decides who should be punished and who should be not?'

I smiled at him, as I did not want to argue and spoil my future visit to the jail. I said, 'I never meant that way, but in his case, I was the one who could not understand the case, and hassled the kid to trap. After all he is a kid. So I have sympathy for him.' I knew that the warden was not in the court to listen or know what has actually happened.

'No one can win with you guys.'

'You can any time win against us, sir.'

He smiled at me and shouted, 'Havaladar!!' A constable comes inside, running. 'Take him to Harish,' he told the constable and looking at me, he said, 'He has already made many friends in police group.' I followed the constable, after thanking the warden for the permission.

As like the previous visit, the constable was taking me to the visiting room. I asked the constable, 'Where are you taking me? If you remember, Harish won't come out to meet me.'

'We still have to try, sir.'

I smiled at him and said, 'We should always follow the process.' He smiled too. The constable left me at the waiting room and said, 'Please wait here, if he doesn't come, we will go inside to meet him.'

'Ok, I know that you will be back soon.'

I looked around to realise that there were many people in that room today; unlike, the other day, when it was only me in the room. I saw many people hoping to meet their loved ones, many already speaking to them, of which, some were happy to speak to their loved ones, some were angry on them, some were crying and some others were not even bothered that they were in jail, felt like they were used to it.

Sometime later, some constable from inside shouted, 'Jo Harishchandra ko milne aaya hai wo aage aae,' this took me back to the world of Raja Maharajas where a person standing on the gate used to announce for the people inside, informing that the Raja is entering the hall. Like 'Raja Harishchandra Padhar rahe hain' kind. Listening to the constable, I was taken by surprise that he had walked out for me, maybe he had realised that I was interested in fighting the case for him and he had hopes in me. I walked forward to meet the angry young man, but what I saw was completely different than what I expected. There he was, Mr Harishchandra, who had improved his physique quite a lot, coming to me, with a smile on his face, happily cracking jokes with the constable and having a laugh. I was surprised to see him this way. This moment, made me understand Vikram's words much better, when he said, 'Harish is Unpredictable.'

Harish came to me, with a smile and said, 'Hey advocate, wassup?'

'I am good. How about you?'

'I am feeling awesome.'

'Hmmm! Looks like you are super happy today. Anything special?' asked I.

'You have come to meet this asshole and that is today's special,' he smiled saying this.

I smiled too. I, then said, 'I visited your dad, learnt about the whole story and I feel sorry for you. You deserved a happy life.'

He smiled at me and said, 'I chose this life by my own, so no need to be upset about it. And, thanks for understanding it.'

'My pleasure, but why didn't you come to me with the case earlier? I should have fought for you and not against you,' said I.

He laughed at me and said, 'Are you kidding me, you could have never believed in my words. It could have been any other case for you, where people, as always, say I am innocent.'

I smiled, as I realised that it was the fact. I would not have believed him for sure. 'But how did you trap me?' I asked.

He looked down, smiled and said, 'To say the fact, I didn't trap you. I just played my card. I might have failed, but I am lucky.'

'What made you feel that I would develop sympathy for you?' asked I.

He laughed loud and said, 'Sympathy? If you feel that you are here just because you have sympathy towards me, then you are wrong. You are not here because of any soft corner, you are here because of your ego. You are here because you can never accept anyone saying that you are wrong.'

'And what makes you think so?'

'My senses, I have a great ability to read people's mind and understand them. You have so much of success in your life that you can't accept the fact that you can also go wrong somewhere, sometime. The words that I said when I was being jailed had bought you here,' said Harish, with confidence.

I was ferocious, I was standing in front of a guy, who was in jail, trying to help him and the same guy was making me angry and telling me that he knows me better than, I myself. I looked down for some time and said myself, 'I wasn't here to argue with him, but to help him. I thought that if he was so much smarter, he wouldn't have ended up here. I should have my patience and adjust to his behaviour.' I looked up, smiled at him and said, 'I am thinking of reopening your case, what do you say on that?'

'I don't want to reopen the case,' he said looking down.

I was not sure what was he up to, he was just out of his senses. I thought that he has lost it, being in jail from so many days. I said, 'Don't lose the confidence in you. I am with you, I will win the case for you. Never lose hope.'

He laughed at me, as if I was kidding with him, and said, 'Advocate sahab, I have lost emotions. I don't feel anything, anymore. When I said I don't want to reopen the case, this didn't mean that I have lost the hopes that I will win the case. I know that I will win the case, but the thing is, I don't want you to work hard and say that I am innocent. I am innocent and it would hardly take me anytime to prove that. I want you to fight the case, which I have registered in the Mumbai police station and win it for me.'

This guy was proving me wrong every time, but I was happy that he was in his senses. 'The case for offering dowry?'

'Yes, the case for offering me dowry. This would be the most difficult case, you may even lose it on the way, but are you strong enough to handle the loss?' he asked, looking into my eyes.

This got me scared for a second, I was not true enough to look into his eyes. I looked down and again looked back at him, saying, 'I will fight for you, let us win it and for your kind information, I have never lost a case in my life and I will never lose in the future.'

We heard a sound from the constable, saying, 'Time up, sir.' We looked at the constable and the constable, smiling at us, said, 'Bus sir, aaj ke liye itne hi samae hai.'

'I feel you you better think about it Mr Advocate, take your time. Think about it and come back to me when you have finally decided what to do.'

I smiled at him, as I was very impressed with the confidence he still maintained, being in a jail. I said, 'I better take my time and get back to you, when I am totally confident.'

'Good bye sir, hope to see you again.'

I smiled and said, 'Good bye, son.'

I came out of the jail, took my car and started driving back to court. It was already 5 p.m., time for me to go home, but I wanted to have some time alone, to think about the case. Thinking about the conversation I just had with Harish, I was feeling annoyed by the way he spoke to me and the attitude he showed me. I was getting angrier when I recalled his words that I was not there for him, but for myself. I was thinking that I am doing so much for a guy and he did not even believe in me. I reached office, to realise that my secretary was about to leave. She stopped,

when she saw me coming back to office. She asked in excitement, 'So, how is my hero?'

'Your hero has gone mad,' I said.

'Why? What did he do?'

'He didn't do anything, but he feels that I am fighting for him just because I am egoistic, I can't accept that I have done something wrong, but not because I have sympathy towards him. He is not able to accept that I am helping him. I feel he is not used to taking help from others and he is blaming the me for it.'

My secretary started laughing at me, that too loudly. I was getting ferocious, so I asked, 'Am I sounding funny to you?'

She laughed more loudly for few minutes and said, 'He is so true, you indeed are egoistic. You can never accept the fact that you can loose something in life. If you remember, you indeed started to look into this case; just because of the words he said when he met you after the judgment. He just said, 'You are doing the wrong thing.' To say the fact, you were not able to digest his words, small comment that you are wrong. You always feel that whatever you do is correct. He is so damn right.'

I looked at her, seriously. She smiled at me and said, 'You, yourself know that you are that way. You are just not able to accept it. Today, you are angry and thinking about the words he said, just because you have realised that Harish knows you better, than anyone else. He is open enough to say things in front of you. He is smarter and you are not able to digest it.'

I looked at my secretary, with a serious smile and she said, 'I am serious,' with very serious face expression of hers.

'Maybe I need a break,' I said and started moving out of the office.

'Take care, sir! Sorry if I have said too much to you, but that is the fact.'

'No worries, you take care too.'

I took my car and came back to my home, in deep thought, thinking about myself. I entered into the house and started walking towards my room and I heard my wife say, 'Looks like someone is in deep thought?' I looked at her, smiled and said, 'I was just thinking about you, my love.'

‘Really!!’

I laughed and moved in the room. I was changing my clothes and my beautiful wife, held me from behind, tightly. I felt so relaxed, I felt like all my tiredness has vanished. I asked, ‘Kya baat hai, aaj kuch zyada hi pyar aa raha hai patidev par!’

She asked, ‘Aaj bahar chalte hain kahin khana khane? Not at all feeling like cooking.’

I turned around, holding her tightly, said, ‘Chal, get ready.’

She was happy to listen this. We went outside and were having a nice dinner. I asked my wife, ‘Do you feel that I am egoistic?’

She laughed and asked, ‘Where did you get all these questions from?’

‘Please say.’

‘Yes, a bit, but why this question all of a sudden?’

I told her the whole story and she laughingly said, ‘Now I get the reason for you to take up this case so seriously.’ I smiled at her and she continued, ‘Listen, it is totally ok to have this kind of feeling. You just have the habit of winning and you can’t just accept the loss, which is very correct for a human to be like that. You always want to win, you never like losing.’

I was just looking at her, seriously. She continued, ‘As far as this case is concerned, I feel you should fight it. It is after such a long time, that I have seen you completely involved into something, your work. So just go for it.’

I smiled at her and said, ‘You know what? I sometimes feel that I am lucky to have you as my wife. I could have been divorced if some else was with me, you understand me so well and you indeed know how to calm me down when I am angry, console me when I am feeling low and more importantly, extract happiness from me.’ She held my hand, looking into my eyes, naughtily said, ‘My dear advocate husband, it took you 16 years to realise that!’ and laughed. I laughed too.

We finished our dinner and went back home. My wife went to bed after reaching home and I went to the bar in my house, took a glass full of whiskey, with ice-cubes and sat down in the corner with light music in the background. I thought for a long time and decided that I will be

taking the case. It was the first time, after my first case, I was thinking so much to pick up a case.