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Mom in Magenta

Geetashree Chatterjee

“You are not going to wear *that*,” squealed Somaya in horror. She was holding a six yard silk saree of shade a little darker than bottle green with a broad yellow border. “Why do you always choose such colours?”

Anjali, Somaya’s mother, was unperturbed by her daughter’s outburst. She knew that ultimately she would have to give in to her. Between the two Somaya was always the more assertive. She knew how to get around her mother.

Anjali lost her husband in a freak road accident when Somaya was just two years old. Since then, for Anjali life had been a long journey of strife and struggle. She was already a working woman. Her hard work and patience pulled both of them through the days of adversary.

Somaya was now twenty two. Anjali’s life pivoted around her daughter’s wish and will. They were not totally wrong when Somaya’s grandmother and uncles and aunts thought that the mother gave in to her daughter too quickly on more than one occasion. But Anjali had only one answer for her detractors, “Who else do I have in this world but Somaya ?” And that quietened all down to respectful silence.

Mother and daughter had quite a few differences of opinion when it came to mundane day to day things. But on choice of colour the discussions tended to border at times on forceful arguments.

“I like this colour.” replied Anjali. “It is bright and fit for party ware.”

“Mom! I am wearing a lighter shade of grey for the occasion. How can you wear a deeper shade?” Somaya countered.

Anjali considered her daughter’s opinion for a while. Somaya always seemed to make sense but Anjali couldn’t help if she had an eye for darker colours and glittery accessories.

After half an hour’s vociferous debate, Anjali settled for a sober beige and Somaya sighed in relief.

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Priya, her best friend, knew Somaya had had a verbal battle with her mother whenever she maintained long silences amidst conversations. At times Priya got confused on who mentored whom? Whether Anjali guided her daughter or Somaya dictated her terms to her mother? She was convinced it was the latter. If you asked her it didn’t really matter whether Somaya’s mother had a fancy for red bangles or preference for snazzy clutches and gold pinpointed heels. But she knew that to Somaya these were important.

Therefore, she respected her views.

**

“Your mother is very cool,” said Ravi.

Somaya looked pleased, “Yes, she is.”

Ravi and Somaya were going steady for quite some time now. Anjali liked Ravi and did not mind his coming to the house or taking Somaya out over the weekends.

She thought Somaya was well looked after in Ravi’s company. He was well behaved and grounded.

Anjali had taken pains to find out about his family background, without Somaya’s knowing. And she was quite satisfied with what she had found out.

“Beta! Keep coming over whenever you feel like,” Anjali had told Ravi.

Ravi was always respectful and maintained propriety.

Anjali liked that.

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“Anjali!!” An astonished ejaculation.

She turned back. It was Sanjeev. After so many years...

Anjali and Sanjeev were college mates. But that was many many years ago. Anjali had almost lost count how many.

“Sanjeev!!!” She counter-ejaculated.

It was in an international seminar that Sanjeev had spotted her.

“You look the same Anjali. And those grey streaks and fine wrinkles around the eyes somehow suit you.” Gushed Sanjeev.

“You look and sound the same.” Giggled Anjali. Sanjeev’s candidness had always been very heart-warming.

“So how’s life?” Queried Sanjeev.

And that’s how it all began.

**

Both of them kept in touch thereafter over mobile and email.

Sanjeev was a confirmed bachelor and had taken life as it came.

Anjali's life was around Somaya. And she told him that.

Every time Sanjeev expressed a desire to meet Somaya Anjali hesitated. She did not know how Somaya would take it.

Though there was nothing between them yet, Anjali felt relaxed in Sanjeev's company.

At times they shared their past and present over cups of coffee. They had been friendly during college time but now the bonding was more on mutual empathy and understanding.

**

It was a Sunday.

Easy routine.

Over the second cup of coffee after breakfast Anjali mentioned Sanjeev to Somaya.

"Oh! You never told me about him before." Was all the reply that Anjali could elicit from Somaya on the subject.

And that was that.

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Opening her wardrobe Anjali ran through her collection of sarees. Shopping was mostly with Somaya. So the ensemble veered on beige, grey, white and other subdued colours. Somaya's choice, of course.

But this evening Anjali did not feel like wearing a light shade. She opened the bottom drawer and in it lay a beautiful Magenta Kanjeevaram with an intricate gold border. It was a gift from her late husband and she had cherished it for these many years. She took it out and the matching gold and green costume jewellery to go with it.

Once ready she surveyed herself in the full length dressing mirror. Anybody who was watching her would have said only one word... "Gorgeous!"

She wondered how Somaya would exclaim once she saw her.

She surprised herself by brushing the thought aside for once.

Sanjeev had called her over for dinner.

Somehow she wanted to attend it dressed the way she used to during her college days.

**

“Som! I will be a little late coming home.” Dinner is in the fridge. You just have to warm it up, darling.”

Somaya and Priya looked up from the pile of magazines they were pouring over. It was their favourite past time.

Somaya’s brows shot up as she eyed her mother head to toe. Mom did not look like mom. Priya’s gaze had an appreciative gleam.

“Wow auntie! You look amazing...different.” She said without paying attention to Somaya’s reactions.

“Where are you off to?” Asked Somaya.

“I told you...” Replied Anjali.

“Oh...!” said Somaya. It was a loaded “Oh” which could have meant anything and everything.

She was about to say more when Priya pressed her hand. Their eyes met.

“No, not tonight,” whispered Priya. “Let her go.” She said softly.

As Anjali walked out of the room gracefully Priya hugged Somaya lightly.

“Som! Let go please...Sometimes you have to.” Said Priya cautiously.

Somaya was silent for a while and then she nodded thoughtfully.

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BIO-NOTE

Geetashree Chatterjee belongs to the Corporate World with more than thirty years of experience. She has felt the need for creative ventilation throughout her working life. She got published and shared word space with stalwarts in prestigious anthologies like *The Dance Of The Peacock*, edited by Dr. Vivekananda Jha and *Suvarnarekha*, edited by Dr. Nandini Sahu. Her poems and other writings have also been published in prestigious e-zines like *Muse India*, *induswomanwriting.com*, *Contemporary Literary Review India (CLRI)* and print publication like *Phenomenal Literature*. Her solo collection of short stories named “A Basketful Of Lies” has got published in 2018. She also blogs, reviews books and films and promotes meaningful literature. She was also instrumental in arranging the first haiku workshop in Delhi which was conducted by the internationally acclaimed haiku poet Ms. Kala Ramesh. The workshop led to the formation of the inHaiku NCR chapter of very enthusiastic haiku poets based in the NCR.

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