

# 1

It's ten-thirty in the morning. Atreyee is seated on an easy-chair in the balcony of a fourth-floor flat, gazing at the road far off. Despite the distance she can hear the noise of bus, minibus and other vehicles passing by. She can also see people hurrying along the foot paths. Once, this balcony had been a very preferred place of hers. Morning or evening, whenever she found time, she would come and sit on the easy chair. Since her marriage a year ago she had often visited her parents but never found time to come and sit in the balcony. Today she is sitting here since morning and has even had her morning tea here.

Today she has nothing to do. Last night she had left home in one piece of clothing after a row with Rudra. As she had entered the house her parents had understood from the look on her face that she has had a squabble with Rudra. Though they had scolded her they didn't tell her anything on her face. Her mother had guessed correctly that she hasn't even had dinner so she had called Atreyee by her side when she was having her dinner. Atreyee had only a little food and went off to sleep in her room. In the morning too, her mother didn't tell her anything. At about eight she came to the balcony and asked her, "Won't you go to office today?" Atreyee replied, "No. Today I'm feeling indisposed. I won't go to office. Later in the day I'll inform over phone." Atreyee picked up her mobile phone from her lap and called her boss Mr. Das, whom she calls Subirda. "Hello! Subirda, I am not feeling well today. I am taking leave." On other side of the line her boss said, "It's okay. You're coming tomorrow, right?" Atreyee replied, "Yes, of course! It's only for today."

Subirda replied, “It’s okay. Take care, “and disconnected the call. Atreyee looked up and saw her mother standing in front of her. Her mother asked, “Shall I bring your breakfast here or would you come to the dining table?” Atreyee said, “First serve breakfast to Baba.” Her mother exclaimed, “ Oh God! Your father has had his breakfast and left for office long back. You are sitting here in the balcony that’s why you haven’t noticed what time it is.”Atreyee said, “Then why don’t you bring it here and yours too. I’m getting another chair for you “. Atreyee’s mother left. She too got up and brought a moulded chair from her bedroom. She placed it beside the easy chair and sat on it.

Atreyee’s mother finished her breakfast of luchi-tarkari, took a long sip of tea and said,

“What’s the quarrel with Rudra about? Atreyee had a few sips of tea, put her cup down and replied, “Your son-in-law will never change. He doesn’t want to come out of his conviction. I have told you earlier also that despite my repeated requests he will not quit this job. If he wants he can change jobs every month. You are quite aware about his qualification and experience. I don’t know what attraction he has for this job. Fifteen days a month he has to go out on tours and those fifteen days I feel very lonely. Just day before yesterday he had returned after three days from his conference at Delhi. I returned from office yesterday to find him packing his bags again. On asking he said, “Tomorrow I am going to Bangalore in the morning flight. There is performance audit in the Bangalore office. It will take three to four days.” I asked him, “Are you going alone?” Your son-in-law replied with a smile, “I knew you’d ask me this very

question. Yes. Neha is also going with me.” After this I didn’t utter a word more and headed straight to your place. Now you tell me, wherever he goes does he have to take Neha along? In my office too, senior officers often have to go on tours but they never take their personal secretaries along with them. For how long can Rudra go on to fool me?” As she spoke she broke down into tears.

Atreyee’s mother put her cup down, knelt before Atreyee, held her hands and said, “Don’t weep like this. I think you are misunderstanding Rudra.” Atreyee looked up and said, “No mother, there’s no misunderstanding. I have tolerated enough for a whole year. Not anymore. I have taken my decision last night itself. I will divorce Rudra. I don’t want to stay with him a minute longer.”

Atreyee’s mother went back to the easy chair and said, “Consider the fact, five years prior to your marriage to him, Rudra has been working in that company. For the last three years, since he became GM (Finance), this girl has been working as his personal secretary. Even before marriage he used to go on tours often and the girl would go along with him. If Rudra had any weakness for the girl, he could’ve stopped the negotiation with you right then. But he has been in love with you and has married you. Apart from this you should try to understand Rudra. How do you get to know that the girl goes on tours with him? From Rudra himself, isn’t it? Keep in mind, if Rudra had evil intentions would he have divulged this to you?”

Atreyee excitedly retorted, “Mother, you can’t understand! It is not only about Rudra. That girl, Neha Agarkar, is not good at all. I have come to hear that