

things of luxury or items which were not essential for life, spoil the concentration needed for doing important works. "The fewer these items, the happier the person"- Mr. Raman always preached.

Mr. Raman always kept himself very busy in his job and the share market works. He had virtually no time to visit even his neighbours. Going out for work early and arriving home late was his daily routine.

One day Ms. Raman with Sonu and Monu went to Chawlas, who had joined as Apartment members only a few days ago. Mrs. Chawla was there to treat them well. Sonu and Monu were very happy to get Vicky and Monty as their friends. All were of the same age group, that's why impromptu companionship started. Chawlas were new enough to be fed with venomous rumours against Ramans.

What attracted Mrs. Raman and the children most was the colour photograph of Chawla family. Mrs. Chawla's drawing room was artistically arranged and it seemed to them that every thing in the room was in the best possible position. The attraction towards the photograph was obvious because Ramans had not been photographed for years. Owing to the too thrifty habits of Mr. Raman. They departed after taking a promise from Mrs. Chawla to visit them, too.

Mrs. Raman returned home with a planning shaping in her mind. The plan to have a photograph of her family to be beautifully placed on the refrigerator or on the showcase in their drawing room or on the mantle place so that whenever a visitor arrived he might have a clear glimpse of it. And Mrs. Chawla was due to visit them.

Came evening. Fatigued, Mr. Raman returned home. Wife was trying to be as normal as everyday and served him with usual snacks and tea but the added items were casein sweets. Mr. Raman at first took a glass of water and then proceeded with snacks, sweets and tea.

Mrs. Raman and children flocked near him. In a way they encircled him. By observing the ambience around him Mr. Raman's shrewdness sensed that some sort of new money bill was to be placed before him. His calculative mind had started to work silently..... would it be a demand of a new saree..... a cooking range....., a Cricket bat or a trip to some pleasant haven.

An uneasy calm prevailed. Everybody was to say something but at the same time each was keeping

ALL FOR A PHOTOGRAPH

Mr. Jayraman was the perfect example of miserliness. In the whole of Nagma Apartment, he was a person who was quoted and often misquoted by the colony men and women as an axiom. Let alone elders, even the youngsters did not spare him from soft invectives and innuendoes. Even if Mr. Raman sometimes lovingly distributed chocolates and small gifts to the kids of the colony alongwith his sons, he was dumped as.. " the guy is trying to show off" - as "me, too, don't care a fig about money"!

He had two sons. One was 13 years old and the second one was 12 years old. They too, had company of friends. Sometimes their friends cracked jokes..... "Hey ! Sonu - Monu don't buy kites or buy ice creams, your father will hammer you down. "Sonu - Monu don't do this father will spank you." Their father's nature being what it was they used to find themselves at receiving ends. This problem had no easy proper solution. Any way, life was going on.

It was a fact that Mr. Jayraman was never acrimonious or had any ill will against any of the colony members. In spite of being an executive in a reputed firm and a lucky man to get so many prospective shares of good companies, he maintained a very simple living. Actually he was of view that

his calm. Mr. Raman chose to remain silent and continued sipping his tea. Had it been some other day, Mr. Raman must have started to talk about whole day's proceedings in his office..... what Mohanlal did..... How subramaniam had tiffed with his wife etc.... Today everybody was suppressing his giggle as well as words. Mr. Jayraman was carefully detecting that some sort of mystery that was playing a spell on his wife's as well as his son's faces. Mr. Raman was reluctant to break the ice. In the mean time ten minutes passed off. No body uttered anything. Monu, the younger son, could not keep his reticence long. With a note of suspense he broke the silence..... "Papa, we had been to Chawla aunty's flat today." With this Mrs. Raman's silence, too, was a hit. She started..... "they are very nice people. They know how to receive and respect others. Mrs. Chawla is a sober lady. She has two sons like we have. They are of the age of Sonu and Monu. They are friends now. These boys are well behaved. Any way it is a good sign because the other boys of the complex are under the evil influence of their parents about us."

She went on.... "you know they have a great sense of upkeeping their flat. Actually their drawing room provides a decent taste of a beautiful garden. Their already well decorated flat is beautified by the palm and other indoor plants. What charmed us in their flat most was a beautiful colour photograph of their family." "Yes, Papa, with Mr. & Mrs. Chawla sitting in the middle," Monu added. Mrs. Raman continued, "it was the most beautiful thing we saw. Their photograph was put on a show case. The showcase itself tells the story of their being a cultured family. In showcase, the masterpieces of Rabindra Nath, Premchand, Dickens, Tolstoy, Agnyeya, Prasad and Dinkar were glistening. Mr. Chawla is Head of the Department of English in the Govt. College. Mrs. Chawla, too, is a teacher in the Shiksha Niketan. Their flat was some sort of a paradise of reigning calm and beauty. That's why the flats of others may be more beautiful and lavishly maintained but don't provide the kind of pleasure, we got there."

Mr. Raman listened to his wife and children very patiently. He got a sigh of relief today because everyday he had to listen to whole day's happenings all around Nagma Apartment. For a change, it was a refreshing evening for him. Now Sonu started.... "Papa We, too, want a beautiful colour photograph of ourselves in the drawing room. We

too are planning to shift our showcase in the drawing room." To Mr. Raman, it was now clear, what actually was the reason to have such a big prologue. "Papa, please bring an antique type golden frame so that our photo would be put into it and it will really enhance the beauty of our flat." Mrs. Raman again continued....."you know, it is a modern style to put a picture of the family in the drawing room. I have some books by Shakespeare, Premchand, T.S. Pillai, Subramaniam Bharati and Manto to which I will put in the 1st shelf and in the 2nd shelf religious scriptures would be put. And in the 3rd shelf I would like to display the paintings of Sonu and Your chess trophies. And I hope ours will be much better than Chawlas'. We will get a more beautiful frame for our livelier and more beautiful photo."

As Mr. Raman was a very busy man, he had hardly anytime for other less important works. Actually it was Mrs. Raman who virtually run the house under her directions. For a family photograph he had to go with family to a studio. Every studio opens at 10 O'clock in the morning or after and Mr. Raman had to reach his office at 10 A.M. So there arose a hitch—when to be photographed. A little planning followed. Every one sat for a chat to sort out the hitch. Mr. Raman told, "Look, I have absolutely no time to go to a studio." Mrs. Raman said "it is not new, we know it but you have to do it." "Yes, Papa, please manage, don't you want to beautify our flat?"... Sonu added enthusiastically.

15th August was days away. On that day no business establishment opens and that's why Mr. Raman was persuaded to manage to accompany them to studio on that very day.

Now everybody was very happy. Their little but beautiful plan was to be translated into action. In the coming 10 days preparations were being made to rearrange the drawing room. The showcase was repainted to match the colour of the drawing room. The glass doors were crystally cleaned. One day Mrs. Raman went to J.K. AC Market to buy the antique frame. Actually they had not the remotest idea about the cost of the frame. Twenty rupees fell short to actual price because they had chosen the best frame there. Mrs. Raman started regretting for not keeping more money. But Sonu and Monu came to her rescue as it was not her exclusive problem but their too. They had a few notes and some coins which amounted to Rs.24.35. They happily handed over the amount to their mother. Mother and children returned

home happily with the antique frame.

The drawing room was clean enough. The showcase was glistening with some old and new books of literary value. Over it the newly brought frame was awaiting to embrace their photograph. But the fateful day was yet 2 days away.

Came 15th August with the completion of P.M.'s address to the Nation, Raman & Co. started to groom themselves up to set out for a studio. At the bang of 10 O'clock everybody was ready. Ting-Tong-Ting-Tong..... the calling bell banged at the same time. Mrs. Raman started to curse the stranger behind the door as he or she had come to spoil their plan. "After so much deliberations we made a plan but it seems it will not materialise." Mr. Raman cried....."Have you all given up all the sense of courtesy? First see who has come." Monu rushed to open the door in a reaction. It was none other than Vicky and Monty. Actually they had come to wish them as their friends were going to studio. What happened actually in the last 10 days that almost everybody of the Nagma Apartment came to know about the plan of Ramans. Those who were free at the moment were peeping out of their windows to see the old couple of the complex going out side with their sons for the 1st time in many months.

Today, Mr. Raman and his family were in their best looks. They boarded a taxi. It roughly took 12 minutes to reach the destination. Everybody instructed the photographer in his own way. The poor photographer was really confused for the 1st time. Seeing him confused, family members started to discuss the problem for a few minutes. Then the photographer was instructed. This led to double confusion of the photographer about how to take the snap and at which angle that would suit their drawing room. As the photographer had to see his business, too, he started to handle the problem by negotiating in the best possible way. All the four were arranged a little smile and "klick". Now their fate was locked in a piece of film. The day after tomorrow was fixed as the delivery date by the photographer. Before leaving his premises Mrs. Raman continued the instructions now about washing of the flim and the paper of the photograph.

The Raman family returned home happily but with an anxiety. Now the topic of discussion was the would be photograph. In the evening Sonu and Monu were elaborately explaining the whole episode to Vicky and

Monty and others too were enjoying. In the evening Mrs. Raman went to Mrs. Chawla and she too explained her the "photograph episode" with what's and how's of the photographer's confusion.

Came the D. Day. Everybody was in suspense. Their suspense could have been compared with the suspense that prevails before the declaration of an exam. result. It was Mr. Raman's duty to bring the photograph this evening after leaving his office.

Whole day passed off anyway with looking at the door and empty frame. Today, when the children had gone to school, Mrs. Raman very laboriously cleaned the flat, as if, some very important guest was to come. She put the table-lamp on the showcase..... to have a look at the photo to be fitted into, in the lamp light.

Ting-Tong-Ting-tong..... sonu - Monu including Mrs. Raman rushed to open the door. The suspense ended. It was Mr. Raman. Six pairs of eyes were staring him in the face with a sense of search. After taking his shoes off, he opened his brief case and handed over the packet to his wife. With a grin she took it and boys glued near her.

"How insensate the photographer is! How ugly we look here ! See, how bad we are looking ! My God! oh! He has really cheated us." that's how Mrs. Raman remarked and it was dittoed by the kids. "Look, it seems we are straight out from the bed with drowsy eyes and unkempt faces," continued Mrs. Raman, "So much time, money and energy lost in it!" Everybody was staring at one copy each with a dejected wry face. Sonu commented----" who is this rustic in my dress? Papa, why did you take it from him?" "You should not have. You should not have to pay a single penny to the fool. Our dream is shattered. You simply had to spank him."

Mr. Raman was looking at them mutely. Mrs. Raman too joined the children and demanded.... "why did you bring the bad photographs here?" "It is a heart-breaking event for us. You simply had to return after snubbing him." "Anjali!" stammered Mr. Raman "You see if I had not brought the photographs you all would blame me so what if it was not good and to the liking.... "you might say, "you had to bring it here because so much preparation had been done for it. "But now that I have brought it you all utter words like these. what I want to say Anjali..... "we have had bad luck. Had it been good we would have been smiling by now. "Anjali, look at Monu. At least he is looking his natural self here.

"yes Papa, "Monu prompted. "Anjali, me too had this idea of not taking the photograph from there, but to quench your curiosity I did pay the remaining amount to the photographer and brought it here. Any way it was bad luck and nothing else." Mr. Raman stated, and felt consoled.

Everybody was still. Sonu and Monu were planning how to tackle the queries of Vicky and Monty about their much publicised photograph. Anjali was deeply thinking about what she would do tomorrow when Mrs. Chawla would come to tea. Ideas of various sorts were juggling in her mind. Mr. Raman was relatively cool but the little shock of losing a hundred bucks in the photograph mis-adventure was surely somewhere casting a lasting spell in his mind.

In the meantime, as if, from nowhere there descended a spider on the antique, the glittering golden dream frame of Ramans and started to spin a complicated comely web of nets all over the frame. Seeing it Mr. Raman and his family started laughing at the bathos of the whole episode. "Nature perhaps abhors Vacuum", Mr. Raman reflected.

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