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An Indian daughter defends her choice

By Deepa Kandaswamy

April 3, 2003

The verdict was unanimous. I was guilty on three counts: impractical, insensitive, and insane. Court had convened in the usual place, the living room. Prosecutors were on the sofa - Mom and Dad. I was seated on a beanbag chair, no defense attorney allowed. "Hanging Judge" Sundari Aunty was presiding - also on the sofa.

Case: the Family v. Deepa (me).

I was refusing to marry a handsome 31-year-old, 5 ft., 8 in., Indian doctor in the United States.

"Deepa, what's wrong with you?" my mother said. "The horoscopes match. The age difference is perfect, his parents are wonderful, and he said *yes*."

"Mom, you know his parents have already moved to the US, and he plans to stay there. I'm your only child. I want to stay in India, be close to you. I don't want to live in the US. Can't you understand that?"

"I do, and that's why your father and I have waited so long. Now, you're 28 years old and offers aren't exactly pouring in from Indians here."

"Once you're married, you can convince him to return to India," Dad said. "You're a

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☰ My aunt intervened. She had brokered the proposed alliance.

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"You haven't hooked a guy yet," she said, "and that shows you don't know how to do it. But you're saying 'no' to a great catch. Have you lost your mind?"

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"Hooked?" I said. "A great catch? Are you trying to get me to marry or to fish?"

"Do you want to end up like Gowri?" Sundari Aunty asked. Gowri is the "spinster sister" in Mom's family. She is also the vice chancellor of Anna University. Freedom of choice in my family is after-dinner black tea, not marriage or spinsterhood.

"You met him," Mom said. "I think he's wonderful. Don't you?"

"Then *you* marry him."

"Your parents can visit you and you can visit them whenever you want," Sundari Aunty said, seeming to grant my family permission to visit.

"Yes, like Krithi," I said. "She couldn't get a visa to be with her dying father." Who did Aunty think she was - the US ambassador to India?

Aunty scolded me. "Why are you talking about death when we're talking about weddings?"

"Maybe you could teach me to fish," I said, and grinned.

"This is the problem with her," my aunt declared. "Just because she runs a successful company, she thinks she is successful in life!" My parents agreed.

The decision was unanimous - I was incapable, insane, inept, insensitive, impractical, because I felt that "success" was not necessarily marriage. I had missed the middle-class Indian marriage deadline - 25 years for women.

Now I'm over the hill, under the ocean, and beyond help in their eyes. Aunty had thrown me a lifeline and I committed the cardinal sin of not seizing it. Neighbors have already offered condolences to my parents.



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Maybe fishing lessons would help.

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Maybe.

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ISSN 2573-3850 (online)

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