

Saturday

Neeta watches her reflection as a smile spreads across her face. She's not supposed to be this excited about the alumni meet this Sunday, but she can't help it. She works quickly, her fingers elegantly weaving her hair into a braid. She'd think of a new idea for every single braid she made, to the point that she sometimes wonders if she'd have been better off as a hairstylist.

Only sometimes, though.

She sighs contentedly as she sits down on her bed and stretches her fingers out. She'd worked overtime on Tuesday and Thursday to get her weekend completely free.

YOU worked overtime??? Masha had texted her. Neeta had rolled her eyes.

I didn't just work overtime for this. I needed a solid weekend break soon anyway. And hello, I'm not lazy or something, she typed out.

Huh. Now I want to ask my boss to give me extra work. Excuse to not show up on Sunday.

Masha had been very much against going to the alumni meet when Neeta had suggested it to her.

They're a bunch of brats, she'd texted. Neeta had sighed.

Masha, we're all grown women, she'd texted back.

Uh... grown-ups can be brats.

Neeta had smiled and shaken her head as she typed out a response.

Well, I'm going. Do you want to come?

There had been a silence.

Ah well. How bad can it be, came a text a few moments later.

Masha watches her reflection in the mirror as she takes a deep breath. She rubs the back of her neck with her hand and frowns.

Sure, she wants to show off, too. She wants to show all of those supposedly successful women that she's been successful, too.

You're missing the point, the thought forces its way into her mind, *you are not the problem here.*

She sighs as she stretches. Neeta is a grown woman, Masha reminds herself. Neeta's decisions are Neeta's decisions.

Neeta clears her throat as she goes through the dresses in her cupboard. She's got her eye on a yellow one that matches her basket perfectly.

She hasn't told Masha much about the basket yet, but it's something she's been working on nonstop since she got home on Friday. It was something she'd decided to do on the fly, when she'd first thought about the alumni meet and the fact that everybody else would show up with something. But none of those women have the backroom full of canvases, the weaved blankets and bedsheets, and the care that Neeta takes to make sure each and every one of her crafts ends up as good as the last.

Neeta doesn't remember where this passion came from, but she considers that a good thing. Maybe it's something she genuinely knows, not something she copied.

Your success is your own, she quickly tells herself, *you're not copying anyone.*

Sunday

Neeta looks at herself in the mirror in her yellow dress, wondering what went wrong. She'd thought it was great when she'd seen it in the cupboard yesterday, but now? Ehhhh.

She sighs as she sits on her bed and whips her phone out of her pocket.

What are you going to wear? she asks Masha. She waits a few minutes for a response.

Armour, comes the reply. Neeta laughs.

Dude, for real.

A message comes within a few minutes.

A checkered men's shirt and men's trousers. I have no intent to impress.

Neeta suddenly feels a wave of defensiveness.

No, no, I'm not trying to impress them. I'm just saying.

Masha's typing.

I'd vote for the professional look. Grab a white shirt and a vest. Pencil skirt will intimidate them.

Neeta chuckles and keeps her phone next to her bed before getting up and going through her dresses once again.

Masha sighs as she tosses her phone on her bed. Of course Neeta can't be bothered to reply.

She rubs her temples. She's going to wait for Neeta to find a dress she wants, and then she's going to go along with her, whether she feels like it or not.

You remember that orange dress she wore at our graduation? It's going to be that one.

She looks out her window, remembering that night. Neeta had been whining during the entire first half of the party that the dress was two-toned, and because of that, she looked pale. Masha could not see the two-tonedness for the life of her, and as far as she could see, everybody looked pale. It was just the lighting.

You look great, she'd repeatedly told Neeta, but Neeta hadn't listened. She'd just kept talking and talking, mowing over everything Masha said.

And then BAM! Alina enters the scene, dressed in this awful foil dress. Neeta insists--as expected-- on spending the rest of the damn party hovering around Alina. Finally, after a whole hour of ignoring Neeta, Alina turns around and says,

Oh hi, Neeta! You look great. Orange really suits you.

Neeta's finally got it. It's pressed against her bed, well ironed and beautiful, just as it was on that day. She snaps a picture of it and sends it to Masha, awaiting a response.

It comes within seconds. She knew it.

Oh hey, it's your graduation dress!

Neeta smiles as she types out her response.

Yuppers. You gonna wear your dress?

Silence for a few seconds.

If it's still in one piece... comes the reply. Neeta grins.

Neeta sent Masha a picture of a basket.

Cute, typed out Masha, rather unsure of what significance this basket had to anything. She received a reply.

Yeah, no. I just wanted to make sure it looked good.

Masha's eyebrows rose slightly.

Oh, are you bringing this to the alumni meet?

There was a silence, followed by,

Hmm.

Masha sighed and leaned back on her bed. A basket. A freaking basket. Those women would mow over this girl.

Masha, Masha. Masha. It's not your business. Let Neeta handle whatever it is that's coming to her.

Masha finally settled with,

Anyway, see you at ten. You're coming, right?

There was a reply after a few minutes.

Yeah

Masha waits outside the restaurant. It's half past ten and she spotted Rita and Alina going into the restaurant a few minutes ago, but thankfully, they didn't notice her.

I'm waiting for you, she'd typed out ages ago, only to get silence. She knew that Neeta had read it.

Masha leans her head back. She knew it from the moment that Neeta began questioning that damn basket. She would've looked it over and thought about it, and at some point, she would've thought,

These women will mow over this girl.

Craftwork was just a hobby, after all, something to be engaged in briefly and then tossed aside in favour of *real* things, whatever the rich ladies defined such things as.

Masha looks around. Oh well. She didn't want to come here anyway, did she? She was the one who kept telling Neeta not to come. Why this emptiness now?

She swallows a surprising knot that enters her throat as she looks up at the window of the restaurant. She could say whatever she wanted about Neeta, but for some reason, she feels her feet shuffle backwards, and her arm open her car door, and her fingers on the wheel.

She feels the heaviness of her heart as she backs out of the parking lot and onto the main road.