



Item Code: 695

Participant Code: 062

Topic: "Someone you trusted  
has treated you badly:.."

"Therefore the petition for the dissolution of the marriage between Sarah and John on the grounds of irrevocable breakdown due to cruel and inhumane treatment is hereby granted."

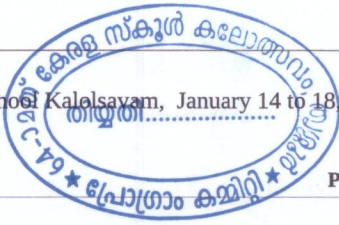
The word 'GRANTED' was a single, explosive sound.

For Sarah, it wasn't a cheer or a sigh. It was a physical, seismic shift. The twenty year old, invisible steel bands wrapped around her chest snapped all at once. Her spine which had been curved in a posture of deference and fear, straightened almost imperceptibly.

Sarah was only forty, but the landscape of her soul was already etched with rain. Her hands were habitually outstretched, her soft heart beating in a perfect, unselfish rhythm with all the needs of the broken.

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world around her. She was a haven, a quite port for any troubled soul seeking shelter. Yet, the price for this profound empathy was a mind perpetually crowded with sorrow. The memories clung to her consciousness had been like morning mist on moor dense, heavy and impossible to disperse, each one of a small, sharp ache refused to fade. She offered the world tenderness but received only the echo of her own sadness in return, making every act of kindness a victory hard won against the internal gloom.

Sarah sat forward slightly on her chair. Her hands were clasped so tightly, her knuckles were white. For twenty years her life had been a carefully constructed facade, a silent prison of her husband's making. Twenty years of walking on eggshells, twenty years of whispered insults, of her successes being diminished and her spirit being chipped away by his relentless self-serving cruelty.

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John, her husband, sat across an aisle, a picture of aggrieved indignation: The very picture of a calm, injured party, which he had perfected for the world: He tried to look like the wronged man, still in the face of two decades that she managed to compile:

His suit meticulously tailored and undeniably the most expensive garment in the vicinity: It seemed less a covering and more a second: More perfect skin, which was an external projection of his grandiose-self image: He interrupted the current conversation not with an apology, but with a sweeping, confident pronouncement, displaying an almost willful lack of empathy for the flow or feelings of others: He entered the court as if he were the missing headline, expecting all eyes to pivot and grant him the attention he clearly deserved.

John's reaction to the final verdict was immediate - choked gasp of his performative -

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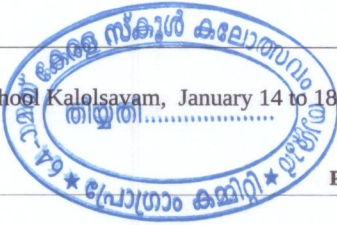


outrage, a glance at his lawyer and again a look at Sarah, but she pretended not to see him.

A single hot tear rolled out, finding a path down her cheek. It wasn't a tear drop of sadness or even pain. It was the manifestation of a silent scream which got trapped in her for twenty years, finally finding its way out. It was the tear of pure and devastating relief.

As she slowly walked out of the court and to a new life, a face flashed upon her mind's eye 'Chris' her son... All these years she'd been trying to create an emotional firewall that protected his developing identity from being consumed and crushed by his father's ego. An exhausting role indeed! But a mother's protection can be the difference between a son who repeats the cycle or a son who breaks it. She was sure that her role as a consistent, loving and

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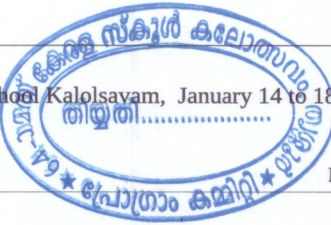
stable... caregiver... helped... this... break... it... Yes, he possessed... a healthy mind... Her... sole... comfort...

As her car left the city, the plain stretched out in a vast uninterrupted expanse, a canvas of subtle yet profound beauty. She felt like it was her first time in her own village. Here, the sky dominates, its enormous dome mirroring the land's gentle undulations, painted with ever shifting hues from the softest morning pastels to the fiery intensity of sunset.

A sense of immensity and quietude pervades the air, broken only by the rustling of whispers of the cool wind rustling through the tall grasses, which shimmered like ~~and~~ an ocean in motion, revealing a thousand shades of gold and green. In this seeming uniformity, Sarah's eye was drawn to delicate details: the sudden burst of a wildflower, the patient trek of a solitary animal or the stark, sculptural outline of a distant tree, all

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testifying to the robust, unadorned elegance of nature in its simplest form.

"It's over... just like that.

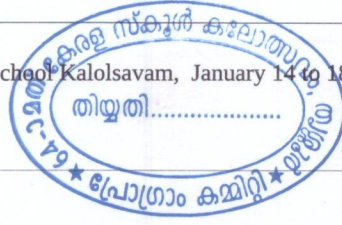
Twenty years... And its over'..."

For twenty years, Sarah's reality had been twisted, denied and undermined by her husband. The judgement was an official, public validation of her sufferings. The single tear escaped was for a young woman, who entered the marriage full of hope, trusting her partner and without realizing <sup>that</sup> it was a slow, silent death of her dreams. It was the sorrow that acknowledges the tremendous cost of her survival.

As she returns, she thought about her past and a terrifying, exhilarating void: her future. Now she can choose ~~where~~ where to live, what to pursue and who to be. But now she have to learn how to walk without eggs beneath her feet, to live alone and to define herself after being defined by cruelty.

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for 20 years... To make decisions without waiting for  
me her way back, she thought  
of her marriage and the events before that.  
Their marriage was a completely arranged one  
by both their parents wish. They didn't know  
each other before that.

John was a person whom she trusted  
when entering the marriage. But after living with  
him she realized, he was a narcissist. For each  
and every thing she had to ask for his  
approval to make decisions.

And John was a person she trusted  
and had treated her badly....