

## "The Perfect Dress"

As the car came to a stop outside the mall, I slumped back in my seat. Mum was silent. We hardly ever went shopping together. She always said that she had too much housework or was too tired but really it was because every time we went shopping together we argued. Big Time, even over the littlest of things. But for once it could not be avoided by either of us. She had the money and I needed it. I hopped out of the car into the freezing air. She looked at me with a cold stare. I hastily closed the door, slunk to the shop entrance and waited for the strong lemony scent of her perfume to close in on me. "This is it," we said to one another as we awkwardly linked arms and plastered fake smiles onto our faces.

As we stepped in to the store, the noise was incredible. Excited teenage girls were running everywhere in search of the perfect dress to the racks where ball dresses hung like a giant swaying rainbow.

"Where to begin?" I said in a bright fake voice.

"How about over there?" said Mum pointing to the row of sale items in a dark corner of the shop that no one but Mum would be drawn to.

As I watched from a distance, she began swinging the coat hangers from one end in lightning speed, and yet in disturbing orderly fashion. She glanced at me and said loudly "You don't want to be wearing such revealing dresses as these do you, Neelaja?" Two girls giggled. My head sunk to the floor. She swung the last dress across the rack and went to sit down on the chair as if she had done what she came here to do and was now ready to leave. That's when I lost it!

"Mum! I know this is hard for you and believe me I'd much rather be here by myself but now that we are can you please please PLEASE just get up and at least pretend you want to be here!" I heard my voice crack and people around us began to stop and stare. There was dead silence. Mum's brown eyes pierced through me. There was a long pause.

"Fine," she said.

We slowly walked down a row of dresses together and I prayed that we would agree on something. First dress too revealing, second dress too boring, third dress ... Silence. We both glanced at each other and then back at the dress. It was the most perfect looking dress I had ever seen, long and flowing like a beautiful river. Mum looked at me, her eyes more squinty than ever, and then her plump lips began to curve. "This is the one" she said. "Neelaja, this is the one you must try on." It was perfect on.

We walked over to the counter and asked how much it cost. I closed my eyes as the salesgirl scanned it. "\$150," she said to us in a low voice. The same desperation I had felt earlier now consumed me. I held my breath. You could have heard a pin drop then I heard Mum say, "Alright. We will take it, my dear." I stared as she took out her purse.

I happily swung the shopbag as we left the shop. "Now that wasn't too bad!" I said as I attempted to break the silence. Mum's mouth tightened then she began to laugh.