

YES, I WILL FOLLOW THE RULES, DARLING!

There was never a fight when she was late in getting ready. But not this time. Because he decided to open his mouth and that too at the wrong time and wrong place...

■ **by D. P. Sabharwal**

"WHAT IS the delay now? We are already late dear. Let us go," I said

"Just give me another moment," she replied.

Instantly I knew that she would take another 10 minutes at least. My experience of many years of living with her had told me that she had never understood the meaning of words like "a momment" and "a minute." Her moment was as large as 15 to 20 minutes and her minute invariably stretched to an hour.

On every such occasion I was more and more convinced that she had read this quote of Don Bannet, "When a female says she won't be a minute, she is usually right." Not only that, it seems to me that she was making positive efforts to prove him right.

After what appeared to be an eternity, I was shaken out of my reverie when I heard her voice, "How am I looking darling?"

"As usual," I said and added, "Great. But don't delay any further. Let us get going."

On the way for most of the time we were silent. Once or twice she asked me as to who all were expected to be there at the party. I replied mostly in monosyllables as I was concentrating on fast driving with a view to saving a few minutes.

On reaching the destination, she was straightening the folds of her saree when I looked at her and said, "Oh my God!"

"What happened?" she asked.

"Why have you put on this heavy saree? Did you think we were coming to attend a marriage? And look at the jewellery! You are decked out like a bride."

SHE VIRTUALLY froze but did not say anything. Instead, she looked at me questioningly. And I could see anger on her face. During the party and on our way back home, she did not utter a single word. At home also she did not speak to me at all. And her silence continued for 2 days. But frankly speaking, the cold war was becoming unbearable to me.

It was then that I realised why there were frequent reports of firing by the troops on the border. Well, the presence of two enemies facing each other, without uttering a single word, must be difficult to tolerate. To break that killing silence, the troops must be firing occasionally.

That is what I decided to do. I fired the first salvo when I said, "Why are you moving around with a bloated face? It is I who should be angry with you."

"What the hell you mean," she thundered. "What wrong have I done to you? It is you who gave me the dressing down that day and that too on the roadside, within the hearing of others."

"I did not do anything of that sort. I just told you in plain and simple words

that the way you were dressed was not befitting the occasion."

"Look at your audacity. You call that language and tone of yours plain and simple words?" she asked agitatedly.

"I don't think I have to sugar-coat my words while speaking to my wife," I said and added, "one is extra careful and unduly sweet only while speaking to his sweetheart and you know very well that I have never cultivated one."

"Don't change the track and deviate from the topic," she admonished me and said, "All right let us forget about your tone for the time being. But tell me one thing. Whatever you said there, why did not you say the same thing at home?

"Because there I had not looked at you at all."

"Oh no," she exclaimed and asked, "But then how did you say that I was looking great?"

"Simply because you always look terrific and gorgeous in that blue saree which you had selected earlier. I never thought that you would change it at the last moment after having spent an hour earlier to decide what to wear," I said.

"Don't try to shift the blame. Having committed a mistake earlier, you went ahead to repeat it," she said angrily and asked, "What was the need to say all that on the roadside?"

"Because you were looking, should I say, awful."

"But could anything have been done then, at the venue of the party?" she wanted to know.

"No, but all the same I wanted to tell you the truth."

"Why? You want to become Yudhishtir or Harish Chandra?" she said sarcastically. After a moment she said, "The same truth you could have told me on our return."

"It never occurred to me," I confessed.

"But what do you feel now?"

"I realise I was wrong. I should not have said it then."

"You don't want to say anything more?" she asked.

"Yes, I want to express my apologies," I said earnestly.

"And no promise of not repeating the mistake again?" she asked.

"That promise you ought to give me," I said.

"Which promise?" she asked and added, "What for?"

"That you will never be late again, for that is the starting point of all the subsequent events and happenings."

"Don't be naive," she sort of reprimanded me and said, "it was not the first time that I was late in getting ready. It almost always happens. But there had never been a fight earlier. All this has happened because you decided to open your mouth this time and that too at the wrong time and wrong place."

"Quarrels would not last long if the faults were only on one side," I said quoting La Rochefaucauld.

"I know clapping can only be done with two hands. But do not forget that if one hand decides to keep away nothing will happen," she said winking an eye.

Victor Hugo has said, "When a woman is speaking to you, listen to what she says with her eyes." The wisdom in the statement dawned on me for the first time; thus respecting it, I asked, "All right what am I expected to do now?"

"To avoid such cold wars and hot exchanges, you must always remember the 4 golden rules for 'peace at home'."

"Can I be enlightened on these?" I asked.

"Always remember that there is a time to say or do something. The current incident should have brought out the significance of this rule quite clearly, I suppose," she said.

"I can see now how effectively you have been using this principle even on other occasions. Your proposals for purchases just before bonus is due and your extracting various promises from me whenever I am in a hurry speak of it. Isn't it so, dear?"

IGNORING MY question, she said, "The second thing to remember is that never say anything while in anger, fear, jealousy, resentment or hurt."

"That is a tall order."

"I think you are right," she said instantly. Then after a little thought she said, "All right we can have a concession here. Out of five occasions listed, we may speak out on one occasion each."

"And which is that?"

"It has to be different for two of us. As regards me, well I have chosen anger. I will keep silent on other occasions and will only speak when in anger. You may speak while in fear".

"Fear of whom?" I asked.

"Of your quarrelsome wife," she said laughingly.

"But you will...."

"First listen to what I say. Be patient," she said interjecting and added "Well that is the third rule."

"You don't have to teach me to be patient."

"But what is the harm in learning something new and good?" she demanded.

"Because I have it in abundance."

"You and patience, I can't believe it," she said.

"To convince you, I will give you just one example," I said and added, "Well I had the patience to listen to all you have had to say all these years and to act on it patiently. Therefore had I acted impatiently on those occasions, I would have, by now, broken heads of half of our friends and relatives and quarrelled with the remaining half," I said jocularly.

SHE JOINED me in my laughter and said, "I see, you have already started using the first rule of saying a thing at the right moment. Otherwise you would not have dared to tell me the last sentence."

"Well, what does your last rule say?" I asked.

It is a golden rule, applicable on all occasions. This rule says that no moment is entirely yours. It is shared by others also. And they can see it from a different angle."

"Well, what do you want to convey?" I asked.

"Look, it is very simple. When you shout, you lose your peace of mind. But then you are not the only one to be affected. I too lose my peace of mind at being shouted at."

"So?" I asked innocently.

"The lesson is very clear. First, never shout or lose your temper. Secondly, whenever I do so, stay cool, calm and composed. And try to smile," she said smilingly.

"Tell me one last thing..Are these rules only for me," I asked.

"Don't forget so soon what I told you sometime back," she admonished me and added, "Always remember that if one side is silent, nothing will happen. So if you follow the rules, peace and happiness will prevail. And...."

"But dear...."

"Don't interrupt me and listen," she said interrupting me, "As head of the family, it does not do you any good to speak loudly and lose your shirt. In fact it lowers your standing. You must behave like the head and maintain the dignity, stature and everything else that goes with it."

"Such a big sacrifice towards what end?" I asked.

"To keep cold wars away and maintain lasting peace at home," she said and added as an afterthought, "and to keep the post of your being titular head aloft."

And before I could say anything, she walked out majestically like a lioness having killed her prey. □□