

*SAVVY ANNUAL 1994*

**SINGLE GIRLS HAVE FUN**

*CHECK OUT A DAY IN AN ORDINARY WORKING WOMAN'S LIFE.*

**BY GITANJALI PRASAD**

**6.00 a.m.** Caw...Caw...Caw...

Do crows have to get up at the crack of dawn every day of their lives? I mean, surely they must be staying up late, caw cawing away heart to heart confidences or may be just some friendly gossip with a special friend or a neighbour? Don't they ever feel like lying in, I wonder, burying my head under the pillow.

Caw caw caw... Forget it. I certainly can't beat 'em. So I might as well rise and shine.

**6.05 a.m.** Should I? There's nothing like being out in the fresh air on a crisp, cold winter's day. A jog will wake up my system, get the circulation going, make me COME ALIVE! My brain encodes every bit of information as it comes in, but the rest of me is unconvinced! I snuggle deeper into my blanket. Tomorrow, I decide virtuously.

**6.30 a.m.** Tri-ing. Fantasies of a lazy lie-in shatter rudely as I scramble to answer the phone.

**6.35 a.m.** "Hello, I'm Niru chachi, remember me?" Can't possibly. Don't have a Niru chachi. "Your friend Ratna's chachi. I'm just here for the day and I was wondering if you could take me shopping." This is it. Something that confounds me. Every time. How do I make this lady believe that it just isn't possible to write "an article in my head, while I am helping her pick up clothes/sandals/handbags? My polite excuses make her huffy. Well, I'll tell Ratna that her friend absolutely refused to help me. Arre, what is so difficult about writing an article, hum to ek chutki me kar dete." (Sound of fingers clicking). Naturally. But not all of us are similarly gifted.

**6.40 a.m.** I have barely put the phone down when it rings yet again. This time it is my Chachi. "Beti, this is Chachi. Come and have dinner with us this evening. Around sevenish. My devrani's son is coming over. Such a catch, darling. He's in the States, very well educated and he wants a working girl! Of course not an independent American-type girl. An Indian girl. In fact, his taste is quite orthodox. He doesn't like girls wearing red or bold colours. But not too sober of course... Loves our desi movies and films songs... I think you met his elder brother once, Umesh." UMESH!

Umesh with the high-pitched whining voice who kept blabbing on about his Mummyji. God!

On my way back to the bedroom I see the crow has jumped on to the window sill. He eyes me cockily as he says, predictably, "Caw!"

"All right, I'm sorry," I acknowledge. "If I'd listened to you I would have been out on my run and wouldn't have had to go to Chachi's to meet creep No.6." I feel the need to brush the bad taste out of my mouth. And I might as well shampoo the memory right out of my hair while I'm about it.

**7.30 a.m.** Ding dong, ding don, ding dong. This is the dhobi. No one else manages quite this shade of manic hysteria with the bell and so I am easy. I wear my housecoat, put the milk on the gas, the bread into the toaster, then open the door. I can't give my spiel about 'how to ring the doorbell' because today clearly Ramu wants to say something to me. If I remember right, I'd told him that if he ever burnt anything or tore my clothes he should tell me immediately. With the air of a magician he displays first my family heirloom tissue saree and then my brand new (and very best) salwar kameez, (the one I had to wear today). They are both scorched beyond repair. "Jal gaya," he tells me unnecessarily. And eyes me with some satisfaction. I'm in a vile position. He knows that. Do I scream at him and justify his belief that it doesn't pay to come clean? Or do I congratulate him at having the gall to triumphantly tell me that in one fell swoop he' denuded my wardrobe of its two most prized pieces?

The smell of burning toast and burnt milk reach our nostrils. "Nashta bhi jal gaya," I am told smugly. I bang the door on his face. There is an important appointment later in the day and I don't have a thing to wear but I will deal with that later. Right now I must finish the article I am working on. In two hours flat. I have never missed a deadline and I don't intend to start now.

**8.00 a.m.** the pen skims over the page effortlessly. My thoughts are clear and the words just flow.

**8.15 a.m.** Ding dong. Would I be interested in a fairness cream? It's guaranteed to make me so much fairer in a fortnight's time that I won't recognise myself. No thanks. I spend so little time in front of the mirror I would be hard put to recognise myself as it is. There's really little need to confuse my poor brain even further.

**8.20 a.m.** Resume article.

**8.50 a.m.** Ding dong, ding dong. "Madam, you want floor cleaner? Manufactured by Al Super Floor Cleaner Co. All housewives are buying. Till now 50 ladies already bought in this building." But they are only 20 ladies in this building. And 15 hold full-time jobs. So he couldn't have met more than five. "Well yes, but one of the five has bought," he says defensively. I can't bear this sudden evaporation of bravado, so in a fit of madness, I buy a poisonous-looking brown powder. "Will make floor sparkle like glass, like mirror..." I am house proud. My floors gleam anyway. But when I see the way this unknown salesman's face lights up as he makes his sale, I feel it's been worth it.

**9.10 a.m.** I resume writing. And today is my day! Two hours of uninterrupted work and it's done. Perhaps there's something in what Ratna's Chachi said. Some days writing comes easy!

**11.20 a.m.** I have exactly half an hour to get ready if I have to reach the newspaper office on time. And I don't have a thing to wear. Ah, isn't that the new outfit Kiran stitched for me? Kiran's absent-minded, you can't rely on her for many things but she's got exquisite taste and she's super with clothes. This outfit is perfect. I run a comb through my hair, apply some lipstick and I'm on the road at 11.35.

**12 noon.** I meet the Editor as scheduled. He's appreciative. And excited. "Why don't we run a series..." I rack my brain to check whether I'm over-committing. I'd love to do this. But the cardinal rule of being successful as a freelancer is that you can't afford not to deliver articles on schedule. I notice the Editor is looking at me intently. Two staffers walk in seeking some clarifications, their eyes too seem to be riveted to my outfit. Well, Kiran's taste is fantastic!

Oh. Oh. As I raise my hand to make a point I can see what everyone's staring at. My sleeve seams are opening up. In fact, all my seams are opening up. Kiran, damn her, has forgotten to machine her tacking! Desperate measures are called for. I grab the stapler from the table and with a mumbled, "Excuse me," dash for the bathroom. I emerge fifteen minutes later with my self-composure badly shaken but my clothes firmly held together by stapling pins.

**12.30 p.m.** As I enter the Editor's office to collect my folder, he barely glances at me. "You could always write it up as a 'Middle', you know!" I mumble incoherently and leave.

**1.00 p.m.** I head home feeling absolutely idiotic. I wonder idly how long it'll take me to live this one down!

**1.30 p.m.** I eat yoghurt and bananas for lunch. Can't stomach anything else.

**2.30 p.m.** Rina calls. She is very agitated. Her two-year-old's bitten the dog. Does she need shots? Does the dog need medication? I look up my medical encyclopaedia. Who needs matrimony? All I need in my life is a dog-biting child!

**3.00 p.m.** Vinita drops by looking green. She's got severe indigestion. Her boyfriend mistakenly used white cement instead of cheese powder in the cheese toasts they had for dinner last night. And she's still feeling queasy. God, that's another thing I don't need, a cement-cheese-toast-making-boy-friend. Philosophically, I ponder the possibilities. My day so far speaks volumes for the single state, Vinita's for that of the romantically aligned and Rina's for the familial. Isn't there an easier way, a better way?

**5.00 p.m.** I go for my evening walk. It really is great to feel the wind in my hair and watch the birds twittering, carolling, doing all kinds of exciting bird-like things, I sit on a park bench and my mind wanders idly to the evening ahead. Must I go and endure another evening of inane conversation before we discover what I know in my bones already – that the not-too-sober-but-orthodox Ashok and I are not going to work out as a couple?

**6.30 p.m.** I don't want to go to the party. And I don't know how to get out of it.

**6.45 p.m.** I walk home still confused when I notice overhead a giant V-formation of crows flying back to wherever they fly back to every evening. Suddenly I realise life can really be much simpler. Yes, I'd head for home too. I would make my apologies to Chachi now. And I'd make my peace with her when the time came. But right now I was going home to my own nest. I'd leave it when I was ready. "Caw!" said the crows.