The Marriage Plot

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Scene One

You are in the first year of college. Trying to figure out what life has in store for you. Eager to explore the vast universe of knowledge that college education brings with it. Looking forward to the intelligent conversations with peers and professors alike. Shyly checking out the dreamy guy laughing charmingly with his friends. The world is your canvas. You are on top of the world, the master of your own fate.

"All we are asking is for you to meet the guy. He is an engineer/doctor/lives abroad, earns a bucketload of money, is quite good looking, and will keep you happy for the rest of your life," says your father almost as soon as you come home.

It's amazing how parents instinctively know that the match they've made for you will result in a happily-ever-after just because the guy is of a decent family, belongs to a socially approved profession, and earns 'good money.' A guy living abroad is a bonus; seriously, what else can a girl want if she can get to leave her homeland to go to an unfamiliar place and start a life with a guy she barely knows? He lives in Mississauga, Canada; that should be enough!

"I'm just 19!" you cry desperately.

"We are your parents. We just want you to see you happy and well-settled," your mother says soothingly.

You want to continue with your education, you implore. That can be arranged, say your parents reassuringly, even though they know that there is only a faint possibility of that happening. You want some time to consider the proposal, you say, disheartened. Sure, they say, but they have already invited the other party to the house tomorrow, so you'll have to be decked up to meet the boy and his family, bring in the tea, say the appropriate things that your mother will teach you, and keep an open mind about accepting the proposal. He's wonderful, your parents sigh in unison.

"Don't I have the right to choose my own life partner?"

"Trust us. Your parents know best."

Check and mate.

Scene Two

You've fallen in love. You've been dating someone without your parents' knowledge for some time now. But now you want to get married. You've called a family meeting to announce your big decision. But you know that it's not going to be easy.

Your parents seem to know what's going on in your mind. Your father is pacing up and down the room while your mother sits with a furrowed brow. You know that they won't give in without a fight.

You tell that you've met a girl who is everything you've ever dreamt of. She's smart, pretty, funny, well-mannered; everything a guy or his parents could wish for. Your mother looks at you with withering eyes.

"So now, we don't even have the right to choose a bride for you," opens your mother expectedly. You want to be as patient as you can be, explaining that the girl is exactly the kind that your parents would probably have chosen for you. The questioning session has begun. What does she do? What do her parents do? Which part of the country is she from?

This is the part that you were dreading. You know that all hell will break loose once they get to know the truth. But you have no way to go but to tell the truth.

"She's from Noakhali," you murmur.

Your father stops his pacing instantaneously. Your mother's waterworks have already begun. They stare at you accusingly; in their eyes, you've committed a grave sin.

"We are Sylhetis. She's from Noakhali. Do you even know what you are saying?" asks your father angrily.

Your seemingly liberal parents suddenly seem like prehistoric cavemen to you. Your family has been living in the capital city for most of their lives. Your parents have adopted the culture of their adopted land. They don't follow any customs of their native place, they visit their hometown only once a year, and they have limited contact with relatives back there. You point out all these factors to them. Your father looks at you as if you have