

*Radio Jago Mumbai 90.8 11th November 2018, 9.00 am*

*Morning News with Eeshan Sayani*

*Eeshan Sayani: For more on the deal, we have Isha Desai, political reporter for the Sakaal.*

*Isha, by what we can hear, the party is in full flow at the headquarters?*

*Isha: (laughs) Yes, Eeshan. After the year of defections and turmoil in the party's senior leadership, the Thessaly deal comes as a huge sigh of relief. The hydro-based technology has promised to not only benefit the drought-hit areas of Maharashtra but also, more importantly, finance some of the party's pet projects in the Pune-Kolhapur region.*

Dai Munara made a roaring noise like a lion, tempered by the fit of hacking coughs after as a dull thud came from the room. The radio in that room kept droning in the ear of its audience like a foolish gossip who never stopped talking so he could remain blissfully ignorant. She turned the page and declaimed loudly "And the lion was angry that the mouse had entered his cave and disturbed his sleep. The wily mouse begged forgiveness immediately and when the lion remained enraged, he cleverly told him that to spare his life would keep his honour intact, since an insignificant prey like him would dishonour his majesty..."

"Dai what is honour?" Alma asked loudly in her reedy voice. She shoved her brother who was trying to reach for a sugar biscuit from her plate.

Dai patiently gave a biscuit from her own plate to the ever hungry boy who despite a lunch fit for kings, still looked at his sister's biscuits with a hunger of a street child selling roses on busy traffic stops. A wailing sound came from the locked bedroom door to the right of the drawing room.

*Eeshan: And Isha, I understand this was a long tough journey to get there, especially considering the initial resistance of Thessaly Co to negotiate with the party leadership?*

"Honour is you, my darling. Honour is being great for the world, being good for us and our family. It is being true to who you are and never betraying what you believe." Alma smiled as Dai touched her chubby little cheek. Dai woke up to a blurry bed and her invisible feet, but now she could see the child's dark shining brown eyes clearly with the glow of maternal pride numbing the pain in her bones.

*Isha: To put it mildly Eeshan. The Golden Fleece has been a carefully-hidden technology with a long and chequered past. The most recent rumours about its current location put it somewhere in the north. Which is why the fact that Madhavrao Shinde, the man who orchestrated the deal, came as a seismic political shock to not only the national government but also to the Maharashtra State Assembly. I spoke to him earlier about the project and his meteoric rise through the party ranks.*

*IM: Mr. Shinde, as a junior MLA in the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha, how did you feel to find yourself as the head of the Golden Fleece project?*

*MS: It was a surprise for sure Isha. But as someone who had grown up in Allahabad, no one knew better than me about the Golden Fleece, its past and its potential future as a great benefit to the community it's in. My strategy was two-fold...*

An almighty crash sounded in the locked bedroom. Alarmed, Dai ordered the kids to go to their rooms and rummaged for the keys hanging from her waist. The keys were old and starting to rust on the sides which seemed to fix the doors of the house into something even stubborn and irascible. Dai struggled with all the diminishing energy she had "Medea, Medea!" She frantically called out to the other side with an almost forgotten name. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of struggle, she pushed open the door to her mistress' bedroom.

The bedroom was the biggest one in the apartment. The king-size bedroom was barely a few inches away from the wall, scraping the yellowish paint off the walls when the master came to visit the children once a month. Once adorned with a colourful pink and yellow bedspread and throw pillows from their home, now had broken pieces of the chandelier glinting its shine at the woman who stood at the head of the bed with a screwdriver in her hand. Winking at her, it seemed to mock its attacker like a gushing wound that was surrounded by cotton but it still wasn't enough to stop the flow.

"Begum?" The nurse approached hesitantly.

"He is going on Times Now today Dai. He is going to be interviewed today and he didn't even tell me. He always tells me so we can work on it together." Medea whispered, her honey-sweet voice soft, always as soft as her ammi taught her to be. Always be soft, modest. Medea turned towards Dai, her black eyes full of anguish but dry. *Never let anyone see your tears daughter.*

"It's just an interview Begum. He did say his party was making him do the interview. He said he will come and speak to you tonight. I'm sure he will explain everything." Dai gently took the screwdriver from her and placed it on the ruined bed.

"He said he would explain. He said it. But then that gossip channel- they kept talking about that girl and him. He told me he was working late last night and then they saw him with that Ekbote girl-" Medea's manicured fingernails struggled to grip the bed as she breathed heavily.

"Begum, you know how these newspapers are. They exaggerate everything. The master said he has become very popular in the party- because of you and your sacrifices. He is in your debt and can never forget that." Dai said soothingly but Medea was beyond her ministrations.

She rose angrily and cried “I made him Dai! I know him from when he was nothing but the ashes of his own filth and failure and rebuilt him atom to atom in the image of those much worthier than him!”

She dragged the heavy almira from under the bed and threw the lock open “I gift-wrapped his career in the shroud of my family’s love and trust. Bankrupted and abased myself at the feet of a lonely, scrawny, hungry little man. I gave away my womb to bear him the children he needed to complete his shiny little image” She sneered as she removed its contents, letting them fall onto the unclean floors. Her hands trembled as she picked up her wedding dress in her hands and turned towards Dai, her eyes and hair wild and unfocused. Her dark eyes were suddenly bottomless pits as she looked beyond the old woman.

“Oh what hell it must be, to be a child of a mother who hates you and a father who doesn’t need you.” She whispered softly but not softly enough for Dai not to hear.

An alarmed Dai stepped towards her and led her to the bed gently. Speaking in the soothing tones of their mother tongue, she said “My darling, listen to me. I know you’re feeling angry. I know you feel you are betrayed. But you are still his wife. You are the mother of his children. He is your partner and you are his. Even if he is unfaithful to you, you will still be at his right hand. His power, his fame, is yours to wield and execute. His triumph is only yours to enjoy and he owes it all to you” She brushed her henna-streaked hair away and turned Medea’s head to look right into her eyes “You just need to remind him of it.”

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Medea sipped her water as she stood at the back of the throng of men and women dancing away on the floor. The headquarters of the party was in full celebration mode after the Times Now interview which had gone a predictable success. Medea was dressed in a bright orange dress that seamlessly fit in with the volunteers’ orange outfits who sang with the deafening music that played. They danced as if in a fit and yelled insults and encouragements to each other as her mind burned in the ice-cold fire of memories and isolation that turned every beat of the song into the aching rhythm of the *shehnai and harmonium*, as her father held court.

*“Are you okay?” She asked in the hesitating English, her tutor had just made her learn, looking down on the decrepit man who lay face-down in the garbage in the alleyway.*

*“This?” The man turned on his back to reveal a half-purple face, bruised and beaten to an inch of his life “You should see what my face did to the other man’s fist.”*

*She raised an eyebrow, “What’s your name tough guy?” She asked amusedly at his wry reply. She knew that this alleyway and this man most likely belonged to a small-time gangster who was paid by the locals and then held it up as baksheesh to her father.*

*“Does it matter Princess?” He opened his eyes to see a woman in an electric-blue abaya peering down at him. She laughed and bent down to give him her hand.*

“Medea!” An arm closed around hers tightly and broke her out of her reverie. She looked up to see Madhav’s glaring face “What the hell are you doing here?” He hissed as he dragged her away from the revelry to a small room she recognized as his office.

“I thought I might visit my husband. I know how hard you work, dear.” Medea said mockingly as she surveyed the office. The office had sparkling marble floors with a dark brown wooden table and shelves behind the table. She picked up a notepad on the table and flipped through the pages “Better Today for a Brighter Tomorrow, Reach for the Stars, Settle for the Moon?” “Such inspired slogans, Shinde, Do you plan to be Chief Minister or Pune’s *Garbage Inspector*?” Her lips curled.

As she expected, Madhav’s teeth set as she let him snatch the notepad out of her hands “What the hell do you think you’re doing? Why are you here?” He looked around nervously “Who invited you here Medea?”

“ You haven’t visited us in a while Maddy. I thought I might get an appointment with the man every state newspaper, radio and TV show in Marathi media cannot stop talking about and find out what he is all about.” She grinned mirthlessly, using the pet name he hated as she sat with a graceful air “What is the secret to your success, sweetheart?”

Madhav ran his hands through his hair “I was coming to see you and the children tonight Medea..”

“Before or after you visit Jasmine Ekbote?” Medea asked simperingly.

Madhav sighed “It’s not what you think Medea-

“When is it ever?” Medea said bitterly as she got up with such force that the chair toppled over, she struggled to breathe through the fire in her chest that threatened to consume her whole being in a ball of fury “Okay, fine. We can get through this. We just need to keep this quiet. I’ll handle this.” She wrung her hands as she removed her phone to make notes.

Madhav stopped her “Medea, her father is Abhishek Ekbote. Ekbote saab is the king maker in Maharashtra politics with a personal connection to Amit Shah. I need his support and endorsement.” He fell heavily on the grey couch next to the chair and table. “ If I don’t get his endorsement, I might as well say goodbye to everything I’ve worked for the last five years.”

“What are you saying Madhav?” Medea’s voice lowered dangerously as she fixed her gimlet gaze on him.

“He wants me to marry Jasmine.”

“You bastard.” Medea gritted out. Every cell of her body was screaming in violent rage as the ball of fury exploded into lava-hot flame in her throat.

“Medea, try to understand, it’s not as simple as you’re making out to be. This can be really beneficial to my political career- Madhav said slowly and wearily as if she was a child, as Medea paced around the room.

“The career you have because of me?” Medea snarled. “Did you tell *Ekbote saab* that, when you prostrated yourself in gratitude at his feet? Did you tell him about who really owned Golden Fleece? And what we did to get it?” Medea smirked “Did you tell him about how we kidnapped my brothers and cut them up while their hearts were still-

Madhav shouted “ No! And he never will Medea, or I swear-

Medea turned towards the shelves of books and started to drop them one by one “Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Winston Churchill. All in the office of a man who couldn’t read till he was 15. An orphan in the streets of Allahabad with just a dream in his heart.” Her voice raised in a mocking half-pitch “A dream of a quest. Where he will have adventures and be a hero. Then, he will be rich and famous and everyone will love him.”

She reached a gaudy, gem-studded clock on the shelf next to a copy of Shakespeare’s tales. “But he no connections, no real talent. So he just kept running drugs for a small-time tapori until one day he got beaten up-”

“Enough!” Madhav yelled as he punched the table. The clock ticked loudly in the silence as Madhav and Medea stared at each other.

She walked sinuously over to his side and cupped his cheeks, her long fingernails digging into his thin neck, “If you try and tell Ekbote that you will marry his disgusting chit of a daughter, I will make such a scene. Betray me and I tear open our closets and gift everything, including your children to the other party until you are nothing but a punchline on Kapil Sharma. I will be your ruin, *husband*.”

“No you won’t.” A deep, booming voice at the door said.

Medea felt Madhav’s shoulders relax as she let go of his face. She followed his eyes to see an older man in a Nehru cap and a black kurta standing imposingly at the door.

“Medea this is Abhishek Ekbote. Sir, this is-” Madhav reached for the tumbler near him and swallowed a gulp of water.

“Your wife, I presume.” Ekbote looked at her with a derisive and contemptuous sneer on his thin reddened lips, his cheek moved as if he was eating something “I thought you knew what to do Shinde.” He said in Marathi.

Medea looked him over as her mind worked overdrive. *Fix it* a voice suspiciously like her ammi’s whispered in her mind “Sir, I am Begum Medea Munir- “So?” The man sprawled himself over the couch and continued chewing. Medea plastered on a charming smile and continued “Sir, I understand that you’ve been very impressed with Madhavrao here. We think that he can go very far in the party-”

“Me too.” He interrupted again.

“Sir he and I have been working together on this for five years. The Golden Fleece is a family secret that I-we worked very hard to get it for the party. It was originally my grandfather’s creation and my family has been passing it down and knows so many of its secrets-

“Our science people are already on it. They say they’ve made good progress and will be able to figure out how to use it for our other projects.” Medea’s lips parted to argue but he ran roughshod over her “Begum-” His lips parted in a sneer, revealing teeth coated in red of the paan he was chewing “My men are at your house packing up your entire luggage. You and your children will leave on the first flight out of this state by tonight.”

“Why?” Medea cried, abandoning any attempt of cajolery.

He moved his massive girth towards her shorter self “I know what you did Medea Munir. You are the Musalman daughter of the underworld king of the Allahabad Mafia. I know what evil you are capable of and you will not harm my daughter or my party because you think Madhav is yours.” He emphasized with a derisive snort.

Medea couldn’t breathe as the walls started to close in “Madhav and I - my brother-

“Oh yes, that brother of yours.” He laughed and removed a ring from his pocket. Medea went cold as she recognized the gilt-edge with a peacock design on the gem. “This is what you were talking about right? The big evidence.” He placed it on the table and picked up the notepad and wrote something on it “I can write two sentences and make sure you never see the light of day again. The Delhi police never stopped looking for his murderer and who is better than his missing sister?” He barked a command in Marathi and stretched the hand with the notepad for a boy came scurrying in.

“No! No!” Medea shouted. “I’ll go. But please at least-give me till next week to gather my things.”

“No- “Sir!” Madhav exclaimed suddenly. He lowered his tone and continued “Sir, next week is okay. I want to say-goodbye to Alma and Shahid.”

“Okay. But you know what’s at stake Shinde. The party has a bright future planned for you. Don’t mess it up.” Ekbote said as three men walked into the room.

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“Sir, sir what are you doing? Alma, please stop crying!” Dai Munara watched helplessly as the men in orange dragged the almirah and trunks out of the tiny apartment. The children’s wails grew louder as the other men came from their room, their arms full of their toys and books and casually threw it out on the road. A female figure sidestepped the toys, letting only one of them hit her as she glided into the apartment.

“Medea!” Dai sighed in relief. “Medea darling, tell these men that we live here. Tell them to stop.” Medea glided by her, her face bloodless and her lips parted with short huffs of breath coming out.

The door was left to close on its own as Medea entered her bedroom. Her anger rolled over and over her every organ of her being like a giant slot machine that played out the same result every time, crushing her chest with its weight as if it was on her.

Everytime she tried to get a different answer all she could think of was the bruising hard arms of the men who dragged her out of the office and threw her out on the street, leaving impressions on her skin that still haven’t faded. The clinking of the gold ring on the road as it was carelessly thrown at her.

The look of sheer relief on his face as they closed the door on her.

A man entered the room laughing with his companion as Medea turned towards them. They froze in their tracks at her terrible expression as she turned on them and walked back out.

*“I would see you be queen of everything you can see, rather than be another princess to trade Medea.”*

*“It’s always you Medea. Just you and me.”*

*“Mede! Stop, please stop!”*

*“Will you give us Golden Fleece?”*

*“Yes, Mede” Murtaza gasped out. Medea’s face turned upwards as she whispered “I will no longer be your honour.” and drove the axe down.*

“Medea! What are you doing! Didn’t you see them take away-” Dai burst in to the room.

“Dai, did you buy apples today?” Medea asked her as she walked past her into the kitchen.

“Yes, but didn’t you see-

“I need more. More apples. Get me some.” Medea whispered as she spread the five apples on the kitchen table and removed her cutting board and her sharpest knife.

“Medea-

“Now!” Medea bellowed at Dai.

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Madhav straightened the collar of his pathani and smoothed out the hairs that were sticking out. Behind him, he saw through the mirror the door open slightly.

Anger and panic rose through him “Medea, what are you doing here?”

Medea was dressed in a simple white kurta salwar and had a wary expression on her face “Can I come in?” She asked hesitantly, her face clear and eyes red.

“Okay.” Madhav hesitated.

“I’m leaving today. Just came to tell you goodbye.” Medea’s lips turned but it wasn’t a smile as she took him and the room in.

“All right.” Madhav said reluctantly. He looked over her head to see if the corridor was empty and let her in.

“You look good.” Medea said looking at his dark blue high-collared kurta with designed buttons and a cedar brown salwar.

“Thanks.” He smiled automatically at the praise. His smile faded as he saw her forlorn expression “Medea I-

“Medea I wish it could be another way. But when you started talking to Ekbote saab like you were his equal, he was just absolutely furious. I tried to stop you- tried to tell you about how good this could be for us and make it so that you could stay in the country. But you just flew into a temper and didn’t listen. After that, I could do nothing but-” He shrugged his arms as if helpless. Medea nodded and began to cry heaving, hacking sobs.

“Medea- don’t. I mean you knew somewhere deep down. We- can’t work.” Madhav ran his hands through his hair. “Jasmine- she is a Brahmin Maharashtrian. Her family traces back to the Peshwas. Her father is extremely well-known in the community and is very rich. My dream was



always to unite us as a family. Jasmine on my right and you on my left. But you know Ekbote saab-" A rush of sorrow went through him as he saw Medea's downcast shoulders. He held her shoulders and raised her chin with his finger.

"Medea, I promise you I will find a way to support you. I have a lot more money now and I will support our children every which way they want. If after they grow up, they want to come back, just let me know okay?" Madhav said and let her shoulders go.

Medea nodded again and wiped her tears away "Could- could you do me a favour? I know its... silly to ask but Alma and Shahid want to meet you. They don't -don't understand what's happening. After the wedding, just try and see them." Medea asked. Madhav nodded and Medea smiled slightly. "Uh, sorry I forgot." She went out of the room and picked up a pile of clothes with a round gold item on top of them.

"Your wedding dress?" Madhav asked as she placed it delicately in his arms

"It was a gift from the qadi in Illahabad. Ammi always said that that the design was blessed by Allah himself." Medea went to caress the dress but stopped herself.

"I don't know if he will allow Jasmine to wear the dress, but-" Madhav admired the filigree of the amethyst and pearl-encrusted coronet. "I will see what I can do." He patted her shoulder as Medea brushed her hair back and walked away.

"When is your flight?"

"12.30."

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Radio Jago Mumbai 90.8 30th November 2018, 1pm

Transcription

Afternoon News with Eeshan Sayani

ES: For those of you just joining us, a shocking tragedy has taken place in the Ekbote family. Abhishek Ekbote and his daughter Jasmine have passed away last night. Ekbote, a major donor and popularly known as the kingmaker of Maharashtra politics was at his daughter's wedding to rising political superstar Madhavrao Shinde, when his daughter apparently suffered a stroke and collapsed during the reception. Here is Isha More with more.

Isha, has there been any more news on what actually happened?

IM: Nothing yet Eeshan. The police have cordoned off the Corinthians Resort where the wedding was happening and have not released a statement and neither has the state government. Though apparently according to a few eyewitnesses, Ekbote Sr. was trying to save his daughter when she collapsed and seems to have died shortly after.

ES: What about the groom? Wasn't he there too at the time? Has there been any update about Madhavrao Shinde?

IM: Well, Madhavrao Shinde was on stage when Jasmine Ekbote suffered her apparent stroke. Even though no one knew of his whereabouts in the ensuing chaos that occurred when his new father-in-law collapsed, he did appear two hours later at the Police Station and has been cooperating fully with the m.

ES: That is interesting Isha. We will keep you updated on any developments as we also have other national news at the moment. A mysterious break-in was reported in the Naya Kala Kabristan near Allahabad. When the police were sent, they did not find anything stolen but something far worse. Two shallow graves were found freshly dug near the infamous Munir plot, where two of the most infamous gangsters of the era, Mohammad and Murtaza Munir are buried. When the police dug it up, they found the bodies of two children. The police say they have identified cyanide as the cause of death...