

Hamari Kahani - Version 4

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An IT professional while getting ready for work, gazed in the mirror and noticed a grey strand of hair. "Age is catching up," he reflected gloomily, "and I still haven't found my life partner!" His glance slid down to his old, faded shirt, the wrinkles gradually smoothening against the slight bulge of his stomach. "It's high time I got back to my exercise routine," he reminded himself, "and perhaps it's also time to upgrade my wardrobe, maybe my entire lifestyle. I need to get out of this tiny apartment, discard my old bike and buy a car." The brainwave triggered an image of his parents and made him ponder, "What is more important? Upgrading social status or financially assisting those whose sacrifices are the reason I have a good job today?"

The thought of his 'good job' failed to elevate his spirits. Career came with its set of stresses—demanding boss, subtle politics, promotion anxiety, and competing colleagues. Yes, the teammates were nice, but it was just not the same as college friends of the carefree days. "I wish my old friends lived nearby," he lamented as he got off the elevator, only to realize that his bike had gone for repair. "Everyone has deserted me, so why not my travel companion as well," he resigned with a dejected smile. "So today is the first day I try out the new metro," he concluded as he walked over to the station and boarded the train...

40 minutes later, he disembarked and began strolling toward his office. His walk was light-footed, he hadn't felt so positive in a long time! His mind raced back, reliving those 40 minutes and replaying every moment from the time he boarded the train. His eyes skimmed the bustling sidewalk, hoping to spot the monk with whom he had just shared a good part of the ride and his life's woes. It wasn't everyday one rode the train with a chatty monk! Given his sense of ennui earlier that morning, he was sure this was some sort of divine intervention - and he wanted to say thank you. But their conversation had ended as abruptly as it had begun...

"What's troubling you?"

The professional took in the man's deep crimson robes, shaved head and tranquil aura. Not one to usually pour his heart out to a stranger, even one who looked

like he could be trusted, the professional remained silent. Yet, there was something about the monk that made the professional want to reveal his distresses. He couldn't quite place his finger on it.

"Well, what's there to lose?" He thought to himself. He'd heard fascinating stories of epiphany from people visiting monasteries in the Himalayas. Perhaps this could be his shot at enlightenment, right here on the train, on his way to work!

And so, with a sigh, he began telling the monk everything that had been on his mind as he got dressed for work that morning. Now that he was saying it all out loud, his problems sounded just as jaded as his life. He sheepishly concluded, "I know my complaints aren't particularly extraordinary. But thanks for hearing me out anyway."

The monk smiled and shrugged, "Well, complaints are complaints. Common or not - they're real. And, so are the feelings that come along. Have you heard the song Inside Job by Pearl Jam?"

"Huh?!" The professional was caught off guard by the unlikely reference to hard rock.

The monk elaborated, "specifically, the line how I choose to feel is how I am?"

The professional could barely hide his disappointment. He should've known! Of course, the monk was going to tell him to shift perspective and to count his blessings. Such banal advice to mundane issues! "No, I haven't heard the song," he let out an exasperated sigh, "but I can guess what you're trying to get at."

"Great!" The monk's eyes lit up. "So, you know you're a very powerful gentleman then."

"Powerful? What makes you say that?" The professional considered himself somewhat successful but would never have dared to attach such vocabulary to himself.

"Because you've always had the power to make a choice, for yourself and for your loved ones. You were never compelled to do anything. And what you are today, is the sum total of all the choices you've ever made."

"I didn't choose to grey prematurely and end up lonely!" exclaimed the petulant

professional.

“But you did choose to devote yourself to building a career in IT. You chose to give up your gym membership and let your wardrobe age along with the rest of you to make ends meet. Weren’t you the one who willingly, and very proudly too, sent his first paycheck home to his parents? Did you not decline social invitations from your college buddies to finish up some work that you don’t even remember now? How many times have you come across used cars at a great deal but chosen to hold on to your trusty bike for just a bit longer?” The monk rattled off everything as though he had a periscope into the professional’s past.

“So basically, I made the wrong choices,” said the professional ruefully.

“Oh no, you made the right choices given the time, the circumstances and what you knew then. Now, you’ve evolved and so have your needs and so have your circumstances. But you can still make choices, and this time different ones. Isn’t that empowering? How you choose to feel is who you are.”

The professional was about to ask the monk another question when someone in the aisle bumped his shoulder and his laptop bag slid off. He bent down to pick it up and turned around to return to the conversation. The monk was gone. In his place was a pretty young woman who was looking at him, mildly amused.

“I’m s...so... sorry,” the professional stuttered, his mouth hanging awkwardly open.

“Oh, it’s alright. You’ve been lost in thought the entire journey, even dozed off for a bit. I’m Naina, by the way.” She held out her hand. The professional smiled and returned her handshake, introducing himself. They chatted for the remainder of the journey and exchanged contact numbers.

“Well, that’s my stop. See you later, Naina!”

He disembarked and began strolling toward his office. His walk was light-footed, he hadn’t felt so positive in a long time! His mind raced back, reliving those 40 minutes and replaying every moment from the time he boarded the train. He didn’t have all his answers nailed down, but he felt equipped to figure it out. His feelings this morning and the ensuing ‘conversation’ had awakened that which had been lurking in his subconscious for a while now. He had come a long way

from where he started – all his hard work and sacrifices had resulted in a plump salary, strong professional repute and evolving needs. Which, now that he thought about it, was a good problem to have. He had made his choices then and he was going to make some now. And, he didn't have to compromise his duties towards his parents or his aspirations. With prudent choices, he could deliver on both. His inner 'monk' had known all along: he was a powerful man, and divine intervention or not, this was definitely an 'inside job'.