



ANIMAL INSTINCTS

Nitin absolutely adored Sneha. He was not one of those pigheaded male chauvinist who preferred an eye candy on their arms. It was Sneha's compassion and innocence, a rarity these days, that drew him closer to her. Sneha was no plain Jane. At 5ft 5 in, sporting a slim figure, and a pretty face she was one of the prettiest girls in office. Of course her overt charm had attracted him initially but then as an accounts head at a reputed PR organization he was used to seeing beautiful faces around him. Nitin had always been strictly professional with his employees. Of course he was not unaware of the infectious giddy effect he had over women. Nitin's impressive presence and charisma along with his communication skills had won him this job and many weak kneed ladies hearts.

Sneha often accompanied Nitin as an assistant accounts executive. For the first few months their interaction was strictly professional. On a rare few occasions their conversation traversed to short personal chats.

It was a busy Monday with hovering deadlines. Nitin and Sneha were already running late for a meeting. "Sir, I hope the client is also stuck in this jam." Sneha said, as she looked back irritated at the honking car at the back. Nitin smiled at the casual joke and started honking at the car in the front "It's better to piss others off than get pissed off." "Sir please stops! My left ear is already deaf with the melodious music from the back. Let's save the other one. I wonder why people blow their heads off. If there are a hundred cars in front, do they expect us to fly over to make way?" Nitin found Sneha's irritation unusually hilarious, he laughed out aloud. He didn't mind getting stuck in a jam with a beautiful chick. "Oh! Poor thing, how did you get here?" Sneha quipped at something peering down the car's window. Before Nitin could solve the puzzle Sneha opened the door and scooped something up and ran towards the side walks leaving a startled Nitin midway through his sentence, "wha.....?" He saw a dirty little puppy jump out of her hand on to the side walks. She returned almost instantly unconcerned of the visibly perplexed onlookers. Rarely had they ever witnessed a young and beautiful

animal savior at work. "Sorry sir, I could not let lil Timmy get hurt." Sneha said closing the car's door. "Timmy who? Oh! Ok. Timmy must have had the best ride home so far. The cheeky little thing is sure to grow into a real road side Romeo" Nitin teased Sneha as he smiled at her impish impulsiveness. "She sure has a heart of gold" he thought.

By now Nitin was well aware of Sneha's weakness for animals. There had been numerous more animal rescue episodes involving Sneha. On a Saturday evening he called up Sneha to the cafeteria on the pretext of some urgent discussion about the current account. Sneha looked stunning in her crispy cotton Capri and figure hugging blue shirt. Nitin heaved in relief as he saw Sneha enter. "She must have some interest in me..." he mused. Nitin had told her only yesterday that blue was his favorite color. As their conversation dwindled into an uncomfortable silence Nitin mustered up all the courage he could. The timing was perfect and of course he was armed to the sleeve with all his charm. It was late noon and there were very few people at the cafeteria. "Sneha I've got something for you", he said lifting up a basket, which had been hidden from Sneha's view till now, carefully onto the table. Sneha's perturbed look transformed into a sweet smile as she opened the basket and peeked

inside. A snowy white puppy slept blissfully unaware on a soft white cloth. "Sneha I want to raise this puppy with you together. Will you marry me?" Nitin asked with a quizzical smile on his lips. "You sly guy, you trapped me." Sneha said smiling demurely.

Sneha quit her job after their marriage. It was entirely her decision. Although Nitin had an uncomfortable feeling about it never voiced his views. Sneha's happiness was all he wanted. Marriage had brought a whole new world to her. Perhaps she was right in taking the break. Nitin was deliriously happy to have Sneha as his wife and nothing else mattered. Sneha had taken Nitin's suggestion to bring up Floppy (the little white puppy) pretty seriously. At first Nitin found all this thoroughly amusing. As the days turned into months an ominous creepy feeling was slowly descending upon Nitin.

"Darling come Na, sit with me I'm dead tired. Your sweet smile will freshen me up." Nitin called out one day to a visibly busy looking Sneha as he slumped down on the sofa. "Sorry Nitin, I have to feed Floppy Baba his dinner and put him to sleep. I'll be with you in a half an hour. Chandana give Sahib his dinner" Sneha called out to the maid as she hurried past. Nitin was amazed and mostly jealous of the attention Floppy commanded. It was as if his newly wed wife was

having a passionate affair. He was ashamed of having to compete with a dog for Sneha's attention. She brushed him, fed him with her hands, took him out for daily walks, frequent visits to beauty saloon, and of course Floppy was the trendiest dog in the neighborhood with an enviable collection of dog attire. Nitin thanked his stars that he was referring to Floppy as a dog only in his thoughts. He was spared from an entire evening of invigorated lecture. "Do you call any fellow human being, human being?" Sneha's opening line would invariably start on that note regarding this topic. "Oh! My God that dog even slept beside Sneha in the bed, least he gets scared" Nitin shivered every time his thoughts transgressed to the sleeping arrangements in his house. Sneha never forgot to plant a good night or good morning kiss on Floppy's luscious snout. Nitin considered himself lucky if he got a dog breath filled peck from Sneha. Such dedicated service and patience is rare even in new mothers. "Aagarr! There was not a moment of privacy in my life. If that dog can write he'll not lack any raunchy marriage material." thought Nitin. Perhaps agreeing to take Floppy along for their honeymoon was beginning of his self-drafted doom. "I should have set boundaries from the beginning when I had a chance." thought Nitin. He knew any deviation from his current stand would destroy edifice of animal lover he had built for himself. It was a disaster to base the foundation of

love on deceit. As far as Sneha's compassionate nature was concerned it was clearly a case of faulty judgment on his part. How could he tell that compassion can selectively discriminate between human and animals?

Sneha had hinted many a times "Nitin Floppy Baba needs company. He gets bored you know." Nitin knew Sneha down to her every bone now. She was talking about a new addition to the family alright i.e. if he wished to raise a family of dogs and cats. "My finances don't allow me to take care of another one dear." He would elude the topic with his pretext. Sneha however got her way around the problem. She would frequently encounter stray and injured and old animals during. She would feed them and keep them till the time they were capable of independent living or till they found a home. The understanding with Nitin was they were not to be allowed inside the house and they were to be only temporary dependants. Watching Sneha with the animals was a divine pleasure. She was like a Florence Nightingale in the animal world. That was precisely the reason why Nitin gave in to her in smaller or bigger ways. He was after all a man with his heart in the right place. Although Nitin was thankful that Floppy was the only one with an entry ticket for the house he soon discovered a new problem. The good word about Sneha's deed spread fast and wide in both the animal and human

kingdom. Cats and Dogs who had received a favor hovered in and around his house. People dropped in injured and old animals without home at Mrs. Sneha's animal home. His house was beginning to look like the ones in animal horror movies.

One day Nitin was busy in a meeting with top notch clients. He had issued strict instruction to his secretary to not to let anybody or any calls disturb him. Half way through the meeting a fanatic secretary came barging in. "Sir, Madam is on line one. She is crying hysterically. Please speak to her. I hope it's nothing bad." A worried Nitin grabbed the line. "Sneha! What is it? Are you all right? Please stop crying and tell me." All Sneha could manage to tell was "Nitin please come.....I'll die." Nitin rushed out to home without another word. He rushed upstairs on reaching home to find Sneha wailing on the bed, curled onto something. Nitin grabbed her from behind with his heart missing several beats. "What is it darling? What is it?" he asked and then suddenly recoiled back. There was Floppy dozing blissfully on bed as Sneha lifted her head from his chest. "Nitin, Floppy hasn't eaten all day he must be terribly sick. I called up his vet. He asked me to wait and watch and not worry if he is active. But Nitin Floppy has been dozing like this for half an hour. He must be terribly sick. I can't drive him to

the vet, I'm terribly shaky. My Baba...my baba." Sneha's head again disappeared with a jerk into the furry depths of Floppy's chest. The dog must have felt terribly uncomfortable with the jerk for he jumped out of bed instantly. On seeing Nitin he gave an unusually warm welcome by jumping all over him and licking him. Floppy then rushed out to finish the warm milk Sneha had served him on his dish. Nitin stood dazed for a few moment and the without telling another word to Sneha he drove back to office. Sneha called him up latter to apologize for her rash deductions. "Nitin, dear don't worry about the vet. I've spoken to him. It seems I had over fed Floppy. Now he is perfectly alright."

Nitin had to do something fast and right. His life was falling apart. That night he disregarded Floppy's intrusive presence and he had Sneha had passionate time together. The following month a worried Sneha visited Rita her gynecologist along with an expectant Nitin. Nitin didn't comment when Sneha asked "Nitin how will we manage?" If God is kind everything will work out as planned with a little help from Rita of course. Following the tests Rita came in with the good news "Congratulation Your pregnant!" "Yes!....Yes!....Yes!" Nitin jumped up in delight. Sneha gave an embarrassed, reproving look at Nitin but she couldn't help smiling on seeing Nitin's delight. She hid

her face with her palms shyly as Nitin took her in a warm affectionate embrace. "Ok! Ok! I'm still here." Rita smiled. "Sneha your life is going to go through a sea of change. I can see how happy both of you are. But motherhood is a very special joy which women alone can understand. You are going to bring in a new life to earth and the baby will be at your mercy. Knowing you so well, I have to caution you about certain things. I have seen you with animals and I know that your kindness and patience will make you the best mother in the world. But Sneha you'll have to be careful about many things. You have to take care that you don't exert yourself too much. You have to maintain a hygienic relation with pets and animals. Floppy is part of family but still it is a dog. I hope you don't mind my telling you all this." Nitin intervened "Of course not Rita you are like a bigger sister to Sneha. I'll leave Sneha with you and come back in an hour."

The news of the new arrival and one single hour with Rita brought in a drastic change in the atmosphere at home. Sneha still showered her love on Floppy but the Dog had to adjust himself to a new bed in another room. Nitin knew he had to share Sneha's love and adulation with another new entrant soon but he didn't mind doing so for his savior.