

Hostess or hostage?

by Suchita Malik

I fancied myself on top of the world when my husband took over as the Deputy Commissioner five years ago.

All those fairy tale romances of the medieval princes once again seemed true as they revived memories of my "sweet and lovely" teenage years.

Dreams reappeared and dormant desires surfaced defiantly as I would imagine the "prince of my dreams" coming to woo me in the evenings, riding his proverbial "white-horse".

Alas, the dream disappeared soon. A white Ambassador car followed by a volley of cars and

the other hand.

As I flew higher on my "winged wings of poesy," the Babu brought the message that the Sahib had left on a sortie with the Commissioner, who incidentally was himself a touring-fan.

I swallowed my sorrow and agreed to meet, instead, an officer of the Deaf and Dumb Institute, who was waiting to meet me (I happened to be something on its management, courtesy the Collector!) and seek my "valued and constructive" suggestions on a problem I knew

"beautiful" evening was spent in playing hostess (they would await the Collector), much as I lamented my sombre role as *Femina's* perfect "ghar ki rani" of the District Magistrate.

Meanwhile, the children accompanied by their respected attendant and "ayah" arrived from their joint evening jaunts and related their "acts of courage" much to the chagrin of their accompanying protectors.

The kids would no longer enquire about their father, thinking him to be on some permanent tour, with a promise to return

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jeeps, and out came the gun-toting securityman, ready to protect the "saviour".

My dream of enjoying a quiet cup of Darjeeling tea in the company of my husband rarely came true.

While the administrators sipped their cups of tea in utter peace, I was left alone to mourn the death of my monthly budget (for dozens of cups of tea and roasted *kaju* were a routine feature in the evenings).

Reclining on a tuft of grass, I vied with Wordsworth on the fleeting glory of the racing cluster of clouds for a moment while stooping to admire the golden glow of the exquisite pansies, on

nothing about.

I muttered something barely audible to him, and to me, and the man took leave heaving a sigh of relief. Typical to his job, he had learnt to cast a dumb look to my curt and smug nod of omnipotence.

Hardly was the ordeal over when I spotted a *desi* looking group using their lung power to the utmost to gain entry into our fortress-like residence.

My presence at the gate helped their cause as I could not (dare not) wean away my glance from those familiar-faces as they were my husband's acquaintances.

The Collector being out, it befell on me to take proper care of them, for incurring their wrath would mean being permanently labelled as non-cooperative and snooty.

Hence, a larger part of my

with lots of toys and candies. They had met him last week when they had accidentally run into him in his camp-office.

The sight of the neatly laid dinner-table kindled in me once again the vain hope of perhaps seeing my spouse before I retired to the bed that day. I could still enjoy the luxury of a candle-light dinner.

A call came on the phone that the Collector was needed urgently for a tete-a-tete with the Minister. He had, therefore, already left for the adjoining town leaving me alone.

While I tried in vain to appreciate Dr Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*, I couldn't help wondering whether I was the "official" hostess of my husband or a "hostage" myself - trying to enjoy the days of my solitary confinement.