

NRI, Wanted

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Introduction

The modern quest for a life partner, especially within the intricate, high-stakes web of Indian matrimony, is rarely a fairy tale. More often, it's a corporate merger negotiated by well-meaning but frantic parents, a cosmic audit conducted by astrologers, and a financial vetting process that would make a tax inspector blush. For the Non-Resident Indian, or NRI, this process is amplified, broadcast across continents via the unforgiving blue light of a smartphone screen. The NRI is a peculiar brand of commodity in this market: a desirable asset whose foreign gloss is meticulously inspected for any underlying flaws.

This was the world Nitin Desai, a 32-year-old software engineer, was about to enter. His own world in Singapore was one of clean lines, logical code, and predictable outcomes. It was the serene hum of servers, the stunning, geometric silhouette of the Marina Bay Sands against a twilight sky, and the comforting, solitary scent of freshly brewed coffee in his minimalist apartment. His life ran on a flawless algorithm of work, routine, and quiet contentment.

But from 5,000 kilometers away in Pune, a different kind of code was being written for him—a legacy code of tradition, expectation, and the biological clock, all compiled into one urgent maternal

command: "Get married." Pressured into the digital marketplace of souls, Nitin was about to trade his orderly existence for the chaotic, vibrant, and utterly bewildering universe of online matrimony sites. He believed his pragmatism and stable NRI status would make the search efficient. He was about to discover that the path to 'I do' was paved not with logic, but with a minefield of bizarre demands, eccentric personalities, and troubles he could never have programmed for. Hindi translation has been provided at the end of the book.

Chapter 1: The Expat's Quest

Nitin Desai had always been the pragmatic type, a man who found comfort in the clean logic of a well-written code. At 32, his life in Singapore was a testament to this principle, a carefully constructed algorithm of success. His apartment, a minimalist sanctuary on the 24th floor, was a world of muted greys and cool whites, the only splashes of color coming from the city itself, framed by his floor-to-ceiling windows. He lived in a symphony of predictable, pleasant sounds: the rhythmic, almost meditative

clack-clack of his mechanical keyboard, the gentle, ever-present hum of the air conditioner circulating cool, filtered air, and the distant, muted roar of traffic flowing over the Benjamin Sheares Bridge like a metallic river.

From his window, Marina Bay was a living canvas. By day, it was a dazzling spectacle of shimmering glass towers and meticulously manicured gardens, the sunlight glinting off a thousand windows. But it was at dusk that the city truly breathed. He'd watch the sky bleed from fiery orange to a deep, velvety violet, and the lights of the financial district would flicker on one by one, their golden and white reflections spilling into the dark water like liquid ink. He would

sit in his favourite armchair, the cool leather a familiar comfort against his skin, and savour the rich, nutty aroma of single-origin coffee brewing in his kitchen—a solitary, comforting scent in his otherwise sterile, orderly world. Life was good—stable, clean, and perfectly programmed. But his mother, 5,000 kilometers away in Pune, was determined to introduce a bug into his flawless system: a wife.

Her voice, crackling with the digital static of a transcontinental video call, would slice through the serene quiet of his apartment each week. On his sleek, silver laptop screen, her face would appear, a beloved mosaic of concerned pixels. The contrast was always jarring. His living room was a study in monochromatic calm, but her background was a riot of life. The vibrant saffron and parrot-green of her silk sari seemed to glow from the screen, set against the warm, canary-yellow walls of their Pune home. Behind her, he could hear the familiar, chaotic soundtrack of his childhood: the sharp hiss of spices hitting hot oil in a pan, the high-pitched whistle of the pressure cooker, and the distant, cheerful clang of a temple bell.

"*Beta, ab shaadi kar le,*" she'd plead, her voice a mix of love and exasperation. "Tumhare bhavishya ko kaun sambhalega?" Who will look after your future?. The pressure, once a distant hum, had become as humid and heavy as the Singaporean air just before a monsoon storm. Fed up, Nitin finally capitulated. He downloaded the matrimony apps.

The websites were a visual and auditory assault, a cacophony of bright, hopeful colors—sunny yellows, auspicious reds, and garish magentas—all designed to promise eternal bliss. Cheesy stock photos of impossibly perfect couples flashed across the screen, their smiles wide and white. The user interface was cluttered,

bombarding him with notifications and pop-ups, each with its own chipper, annoying little

ding. As an NRI with a stable job, he figured he'd be a prime commodity, a desirable asset in this digital marketplace of souls. He believed his search would be efficient. Little did he know, he was stepping into a minefield paved not with logic, but with the bizarre demands of strangers.

His first match was Priya from Mumbai. Her profile picture was beautiful, bathed in the soft, golden light of a seaside sunset, her hair catching the last rays of the dying sun. Their initial chat was promising. They reminisced about the shared sensory experiences of India—the spicy, tangy aroma of street-side pani puri, the sharp scent of mint and tamarind water, and the comforting, earthy warmth of a perfectly cooked dal. He found himself smiling, the soft taps of his fingers on the phone screen a gentle rhythm in the quiet of his evening. He was starting to relax.

Then, out of nowhere, her message landed. It wasn't the soft *swoosh* of a normal message, but a sharp, clinical *ping* that made him jolt. The notification light on his phone blinked a cold, insistent blue. On the screen, nestled in a cheerful chat bubble, were the words: "Send me your horoscope. And bank statement for last six months". Nitin stared at the stark black text, his smile vanishing. The aroma of his now-cooling coffee seemed to fade. He let out a short, sharp laugh, but the sound was swallowed by the profound, high-ceilinged silence of his apartment. Surely, it was a joke. He typed back a laughing emoji, waiting for her to do the same. The silence that followed was his answer. It wasn't a joke.