

# Arranged marriage, American-style

By  
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## Story highlights

The author's parents wanted to arrange her marriage, but she avoided the subject

Her parents had an arranged marriage, following an Indian cultural tradition

She finally agreed to a date with a potential husband, with interesting results

It was like any blind date. I had dressed in my Saturday best and walked to my favorite brunch restaurant in West Los Angeles to meet a guy -- let's call him Raj -- for the first time.

I recognized him from the pictures I'd seen, and we greeted each other with smiles and a firm handshake.

We had e-mailed a few times and spoken on the phone to confirm our plans. He was polite; he didn't sit down in his chair until I did, and he paid the bill.

Our conversation was casual to begin with: favorite movies, music, plans for the summer. No one would have guessed this setup was to be the start of an arranged marriage.

Most Westerners may think the concept of arranged marriage is backward or antiquated -- and if you watch the old Indian movies, it can come across that way: two people meet once, or not at all, before their wedding day and then are forced to make a marriage work without even being consulted about their partner. In my family, at least, that was rarely the case. My parents met and spoke before their wedding day in India and were asked whether they each saw a future with the other.

It's easy for me to rebel against this tradition my family has maintained and say, "That was then, this is now." But despite having been born and raised in America, where arrangements like this are far from a cultural norm, I understand their perspective. All they want for me is security.

Raj had a stable job, and he's well-educated. He is from a well-reputed family and comes highly recommended by family friends as a hard-working, respectful man. He was a catch in my parents' eyes. I decided to meet him after nearly a year of my parents pestering me to meet potential mates that I waved off for various reasons -- I was too young, I needed time to start my career off right, I wasn't interested, etc. But finally I caved.

By the time Raj and I had finished our brunch that sunny Saturday, I knew that a relationship would never work out. We had nothing in common except for our heritage, yet I didn't end the date there. I felt a responsibility to at least give him a little bit more time. I attributed the awkwardness of our interactions to nervousness. Maybe I was being hypercritical? Did I peg him as a boring because he ordered the fruit plate for brunch when all I wanted was a large omelet?

A part of me wanted something to work out between us; maybe we could date for a little while and then get married and make everyone happy. But as we talked after brunch that day, it was more apparent that a romance between Raj and me wasn't in the cards. His ideals were far more traditional than mine. I felt like I needed to be another person around him, not the career-oriented, passionate, food-loving, world-traveling woman that I am. I was also headed to graduate school in the fall and had to consider being engaged and trying to start a relationship with someone during that hectic time.

At the end of our date, he asked whether we could get married that December. Get married? I wasn't even sure I wanted to have dessert with him! So I awkwardly tried to skirt around the subject of marriage and explained that I had a lot to think about with grad school coming up. I was hoping he'd mistake my dishonesty for kindness.

After I went back to Singapore, where I lived at the time, I discussed the decision with my parents and outlined the reasons why I knew things would never work between Raj and me, even though we hadn't spent much time together. To my surprise, they understood and trusted my judgment. I then had the tough task of telling Raj we wouldn't be marrying in December. He responded with a polite e-mail telling me he understood my decision. I never talked to him again.

Since then, my parents have let the subject of an arranged marriage drop. I gave their way a chance and that was enough for them.

I think they understand I'm different from my cousins -- and mostly because they raised me to be the person I am today. But I do understand their reasons behind trying to get me to consider an arranged marriage. It's not some foreign tradition they arbitrarily adopted to make me miserable or different. They want me to find someone they approve of and I can learn to love. They want me to be settled, and most importantly they want me to be happy.

Maybe if Raj had been my ideal guy, I would have been married by now. I wish I could have come back to my parents and told them that all they wanted for me and all I wanted in a husband had aligned in Raj. I don't know if I'll end up having an arranged marriage -- likely not. But that's not because I had a horrifying experience. What I do know is that until I get married, my mom will be dropping not-so-subtle hints that the best (Mother's Day, birthday, holiday ...) gift for her would be me getting married.

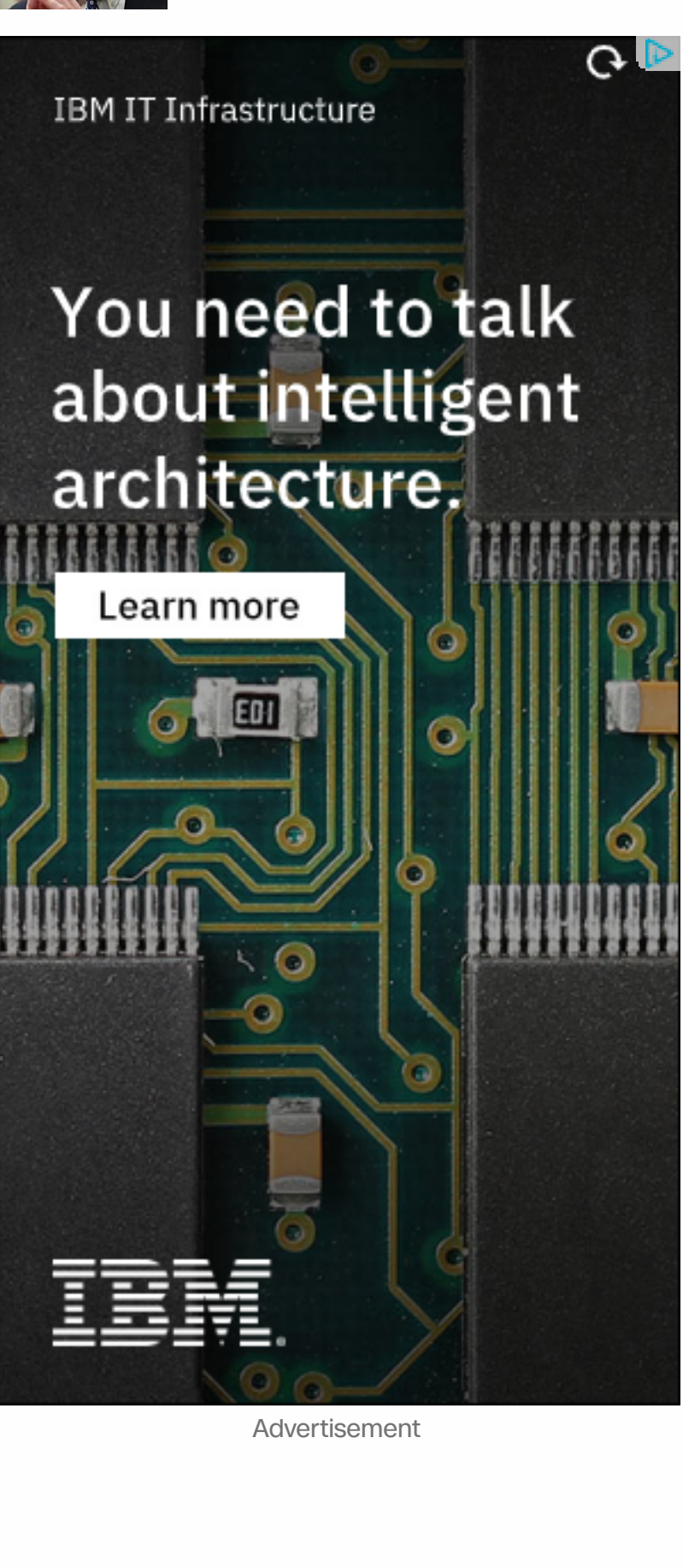
And in case you were wondering, Raj got married that December, just like he wanted.

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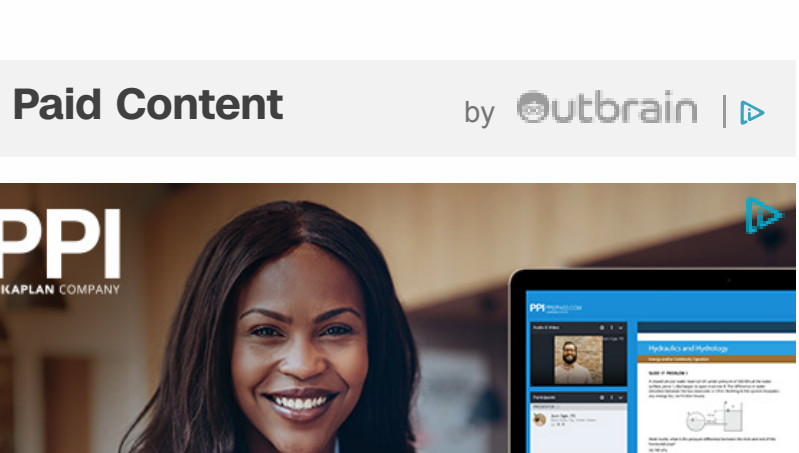
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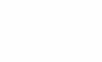


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