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The composition is based on one or more of the pictures below:



Usually, I could amble peacefully around my neighbourhood department store, browsing unhurriedly for something that would catch my fancy. Today was a little different. I was bumping into people everywhere as a huge crowd of people had thronged into the store for its 50th anniversary sale.

At the Ladies' Department, the excitement had reached fever pitch. Prices had been slashed by as much as seventy percent and store signs were declaring that "Everything Must Go!" Clothes hangers clicked as eager shoppers thumbed through racks of dresses, hoping to land a **trendy** item on the cheap. Over at the bins, women jostled one another as they dug into heaps of lovely tops going at an **irresistible** price of \$7 a piece. In one corner, a long queue snaked in loops from the fitting room.

As the crush became worse, temperatures rose and I suddenly felt a little warm and uncomfortable. This was unlike a typical day, when the store would feel as cool and refreshing as a winter holiday resort.

Even her wardrobe would not be spared. Although my grandmother often advised her to dress smartly for work, my mother would stubbornly stick to wearing outfits that had become drab and discoloured from repeated washing. Whenever a big sale hit the town, she would accompany her friends to the shopping mall only to disappear into thin air within minutes of arriving. In her scramble to scrimp over pennies, my mother dispensed with changing her shabby wardrobe.

One Friday evening, however, my mother was walking around town when a window display in a boutique caught her eye. She was not a very fashionable person but the two-piece suit in the display somehow captivated her. Moreover, her boss, Mrs Sorenson, had been shooting annoyed glances at her outfits lately.

So my mother stepped into the **exclusive** boutique. Once there, she stood transfixed at the chiffon blouse with ruffled sleeves and flouncy black skirt. She **caressed** the fine material and gazed with admiration at the fine stitching. Before she knew it, she had put on the dress in the fitting room and was parading proudly before the store mirror, delighting in how slim she looked. In minutes, she was out of the store swinging her smart shopping bag with her \$999 purchase snugly packed in it.

However, the happiness did not last. When my mother woke up the next morning, she was struck with the grave realisation that the previous day's purchase had **blown her budget** for the month and she now had to dip into her precious savings. Moreover, it was an outfit that was too dressy for the office she worked in. It would have to stay in her wardrobe as **a white elephant** till the next grand office party at year end.

It dawned on the young woman just how foolish she had been. While being extremely careful not to part with a single penny, on the spur of a moment she had been **extravagant** and mindlessly **frittered**

away her hard-earned money. As my mother said after narrating that episode, one should never fall into the trap of being “Penny wise, pound foolish”. Her counsel was that I should always keep a sensible head when out shopping. It is a piece of advice that will always remain etched in my mind.



Words to Learn

expenditure: spending money

exclusive: only meant for a particular group of people

caress: gently feel something with your hand

blow one's budget: to spend beyond what your budget allows

a white elephant: something that is useless and yet costs a lot

extravagant: to spend too freely

fritter: misspend or waste