

TODAY'S STORY 26TH FEB

7AM

Title: The 9:42 PM Local

The 9:42 PM local from Churchgate moved steadily through the night, carrying office workers, tired shopkeepers, and a few silent students back to their homes. Ananya sat near the window, her bag resting on her lap, her admit card

tucked carefully inside a notebook that she had opened and closed at least twenty times that day. The city lights flickered past, but her mind remained fixed inside the examination hall she had left barely an hour ago. This had been her third attempt at IBPS PO. In the morning, her younger brother Ritesh had

followed her to the door and asked, with innocent confidence, whether this would finally be her year. She had smiled because that is what older sisters do when they do not want their doubts to become visible.

Inside the exam centre, the English section had appeared manageable. She recognised the grammar

patterns, the filler traps, the subtle tone of the reading comprehension passage.

For the first twenty minutes, her confidence had grown steadily. Her preparation had not been weak. She had attended classes. She had solved mock tests. She had revised rules.

Yet somewhere in the middle of the section, something invisible shifted.

The clock on the screen seemed to move faster. The clicking sounds of other candidates grew sharper. A wave of urgency replaced her calm focus. Instead of analysing carefully, she began trusting speed over logic. She changed answers she had originally solved

correctly. She marked “No Error” without re-reading the sentence structure. She attempted fillers based on instinct rather than elimination.

When the final timer appeared, she knew she had not failed because of ignorance. She had failed because of haste.

On the train, her phone vibrated with a message

from her friend Sameer asking how the paper had gone. She almost typed that it was fine, but honesty felt heavier and more necessary than pride. She replied that she had rushed through the English section again. His response was gentle but direct. He reminded her that this had been her pattern in almost every mock test.

At home, her father did not interrogate her about attempts or expected cut-offs. He simply placed a cup of tea beside her books and told her that preparation would resume the next day as it always had. That quiet faith unsettled her more than any criticism would have.

Later that night, Ananya opened her old error diary,

a notebook she had once maintained with discipline and then gradually ignored as exams grew closer. Page after page revealed the same weakness repeated in different forms: impatience, overconfidence, unnecessary answer changes, and panic-driven attempts.

She realised that her knowledge was not incomplete; her control was.

Instead of reacting emotionally, she decided to observe herself as if she were analysing someone else's performance. She wrote clearly at the top of a fresh page that speed must emerge from accuracy and not replace it. She resolved that every mock test would

now be followed by deeper analysis than the test itself.

The next morning, while the city prepared for another day, Ananya sat at her desk before sunrise. She solved a reading comprehension passage slowly, paying attention to tone and inference. She revised one grammar rule thoroughly and practised five questions without looking at the

timer. The urgency was gone, replaced by deliberate clarity.

The 9:42 PM local would continue to run every night, but Ananya no longer felt carried by time. She had chosen to regain command over it.

Sometimes transformation does not announce itself loudly. It begins quietly, at a desk, when a student

decides that discipline will
replace panic and that
preparation will no longer
be hurried but built with
intention.

— Kinjal Ma'am ✨