

DEDICATION



ITHA CHANDRAIAH

DEDICATION

(Telugu Short Stories of Itha Chandraiah)

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VIJAYA DASHAMI

The engine whistled.

"Today is Vijaya Dashami*. You started on your journey as this is an auspicious day. Be careful during the travel. Give a ring as soon as you reach your place, dear!"

Shravani could see tears clouding the eyes of her mother as the train steamed off. She was moved by the repeated caution which reflected the deep affection of a mother.

"Don't think that my daughter is a coward". A smile danced on the lips of Shravani as her father said these words twirling his moustache proudly.

"I'll do so mother! Get going. Take care of your health, both of you!" Shravani waved them good-bye as her nose stud sparkled brightly.

"Don't worry! Your father retired from the army only the other day! He is sound as a nut. But take care of yourself as you are with child!" Her mother twisted her lips uttering these words, looking at her husband.

As the train moved off Shravani could not hear her mother clearly. The crowded platform was noisy with passengers and those who came to see their relatives and friends off.

"Give a phone call as soon as you reach home". Her father's booming voice was clearly audible. What if he is a big army officer! He made fun of his wife a minute ago but repeated her words himself now! Shravani's eyes moistened at the innate love her father had for her.

The train, like Time, was running forward without looking back. Shravani glanced at the other passengers. They were all lost in conversation. She pushed her suit case beneath the seat and sat leaning back comfortably.

She wanted to inform her husband that she was going over there..... but why was not the telephone lifted? Where did Praveen go? He will not be in the shop anyway. Her lord had too many avocations! She must squeeze the details out of him after she reached home. When she boxes

* The tenth day of the month Asweyuja on which goddess Durga and weapons are worshipped. On this day goddess Durga fought and killed Mahishasura, the demon king.

his ears, he will shout with pain. On such occasions one should see him..... a beautiful sight it would be..... and the squeals he makes in pain!

Praveen!..... A handsome guy. Active and alert. It was her luck to share life with such a great lover. His parents were dead. He had no relatives living within reach. So what? He was educated.... He loved her with all his heart. He worshipped her with flowers!

Though highly educated, she was a woman. What was more valuable for a woman than her husband's love and affection? By Lord Srimannarayana's grace she had no problems in her life. Her father was a patriot who was protecting the borders of the country along icy mountains, in Kargil ranges, as a senior army officer. Mother, brother and herself were in the care of her maternal uncles leading middle class lives happily. She completed her P.G. course of two years as if in two months! Praveen was responsible for this achievement. Youthful Praveen with his side-long looks and gentle smiles mesmerized her heart..... That day..... She saw him in the Lakshmi Narayana temple where she used to go everyday..... He stood by her side, opposite the deity, in the sanctum sanctorum. He handed over the coconut and 'harathi' ticket to the priest, glancing at her.

"Tell me your gothra*, your name and your wife's name" said the priest looking at them both.

"Gothra is Bharadwaja, name Praveen. I am a bachelor. Of course the hunt for a partner has started," told Praveen to the priest glancing at Shravani. They were not just looks. His eyes sprayed nectar and shot shafts of love at her. His radiant smile, which spread along his lip under the dark moustache, touched the innermost recesses of her heart. It was a never imagined, never tasted feeling, altogether a new experience

Praveen received half the coconut from the priest, picked up a flower from those given by the priest and offered it to Shravani.

"Please..... accept this. A flower blooms forth better in the plait of a girl than on the ear of a man. No one knows in which garden this flower blossomed, which gardener plucked it. But it has been sanctified in the

* Lineage

worship of the Lord. Give me the privilege of adorning your plait with it." Praveen spoke to Shravani politely.

Oh! how poetic! She could not say 'no' .

"Eai, Shravani!" Her roommate pulled her holding her hand. "If we go late to the hostel we will miss our breakfast and miss the lecture too.... Get along !"

Next Saturday she saw him in the temple.

"Namasthe, I am Praveen. I am the proprietor of the electronics shop in the main market", said Praveen greeting her with folded hands. Cultured Shravani returned his greeting and introduced herself to him.

She did not imagine, let alone dream, that the simple acquaintance would act as the seed of love, sprout, strike a bud and grow into a big tree.... leading to marriage.

Yes, that was the truth! People recognize the presence of god only when un- expected things happened. If all things happen as expected, man will grow greater than God!

The Srimannarayana Mandir, constructed at a cost of crores of rupees, the most sought after temple by devotees, was a renowned cultural centre, a place of spiritual regeneration. There were beautiful sculptures chistled all round the temple which were in no way inferior to Ajantha and Elora art. The Lord, like a magnet, attracted devotees from all the four corners of the country. It was her luck and fortune that the P.G. hostel was situated so near such a great temple. Her mother who would not touch even water before completing her daily pooja, was her ideal and model. Perhaps that was the reason why she felt a special liking for Praveen who visited the temple every day.

How happy was her father who came to her after his retirement to take her back home when she was with child for the first time for the 'seemantham'* ceremony! How great a conversationalist was Praveen!

"Babu! You should attend the 'seemantham' ceremony without fail."

* A ceremony performed at the time of first pregnancy.

"What is it, father-in-law! Should I come alone?"

"Not so, dear son-in-law! You must come with family and friends and bless the son to be born with all your heart and accept the hospitality I extend to you all with good grace....."

How loudly Praveen laughed hearing her father's words!

Father indulged in such long dialogues when he was in a happy mood.

"You have a great command over the literary language" said Praveen, controlling his laughter. "Believe me if I say you look like a young man of twenty five. Who was it that retired you from service so early? They should be taken to task", concluded Praveen.

The whole house reverberated with the hearty laughter of all the three of us.

Praveen turned up to attend the 'seemantham' ceremony keeping his word accompanied by his friends, John and Imbrahim.

How noble minded were John and Ibrahim! "That is not it sister!"..... "It is like this sister!," the two treated her as their own sister affectionately.

They were both employed in a private company and moved about a great deal. Yet they managed to spend some time with Praveen every week.

The three friends moved around the house happily. They spoke with all relatives and now their hearts with their talk. They cracked jokes and made father and mother also laugh and enlivened the 'seemantham' ceremony with their presence.

Next day before they left. "Praveen! Sister will stay here till she is delivered of her baby. If she is with you she will be asked to do all the work by you", said John.

'Oh God! Could I live alone leaving Praveen for so many days!' Shravani felt worried.

"Nothing doing! What will happen to us if sister stays away here for such a long time? Sister cooks divinely. If we do not taste the manna

cooked by her at least once a week, will we not wither away like dried brinjals? Let her stay here for some days, not till her delivery." Ibrahim suggested his alternative.

"Okay, she will stay here for a week" agreed Praveen observing her father's reaction.

"Sorry, babu! Let her stay here for two or three weeks," father interfered. We have to go to Delhi for a week or so shortly. We will leave for Delhi and send Shravani to you. After we return from Delhi I will send her mother. She will stay with you for a month and then bring Shravani for the delivery." Father announced the time-table.

"It is okay, father. I was not born to enjoy the love and affection of my parents. I see them in you both..... By the way, during the time Shravani is here, I will visit her at least once a week...." Praveen's voice went hoarse.

"If you are so much devoted to your in-laws, you may forget us!" John joked.

"Nothing happens if he forgets us. We have our sister. If he ignores us he may have to forego food and starve." Ibrahim dismissed the possibility of Praveen forgetting them. Every one was happy with the sentiments expressed.

"It is our fortune to find a son-in-law like you, Babu."

Shravani felt elated at the words of her father who generally did not praise others easily.

Before leaving, Praveen, John and Ibrahim exchanged glances and smiled while whispering something among themselves in their conversation. Shravani's looks were directed only on Praveen.

"I will be eagerly waiting for you like the nightingale that awaits the October showers, Shravani!" Praveen said and bade her good-bye with his eyes.

My husband is an expert in using the language, true to his name. Shravani's heart beats quivered her lips.

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The engine whistled announcing the station's proximity.

"How far are you going, young lady?" the woman sitting opposite Shravani asked. Her broad forehead had a red bindi and the pearl nose stud sparkled.

The train was shedding speed like a cricketer who was tired after fielding the whole day.

"I am asking you..... where should you get off ?" The lady held Shravani's arm and shook her.

"Me ?" Shravani told her destination to the woman adjusting the pallu of her saree.

"Is that so ?..... Then we are nearing that station!"

"Yes, Yes." Shravani pulled out the suitcase from beneath the seat and held it. She saw Praveen's image in her mind.

..... It was a Sunday! Her lord would be at home. She must go quickly and imprison him in her embrace..... Her heartbeats gave out their smiles.

Even before she could reach her house, getting off the auto, the sweet welcoming words of Praveen..... pleasant chat..... pleasantries..... many other sweet nothings filled her mind.

The house was not locked. That means Praveen was at home! She walked in quickly. Her mind propelled her forward..... She placed the suitcase on the chest of drawers and walked into the bedroom. Praveen was not there. She came out and was about to enter the next room. The door was a-jar a little. Praveen was talking to someone. She stopped.

Who was in the room? What was being said? Curiosity led her to the window. She could see everything from the window. She could hear the words clearly..... Her lord was drinking liquor with John and Ibrahim.

On the small table half empty bottles. Beside it an unopened full bottle. A plate with chips on one side..... Chicken fry on the other.

"Arre Ibrahim! Our Praveen has very strange thoughts!" John sipped whisky and chewed the chicken fry. "He did not heed my suggestion to

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @

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