

Return Gift

“Vadina¹!” Mandakini turned away from the window with a start and looked at the door of her room. Her youngest brother-in-law Madhu who most closely resembled her late husband, was standing there, with one foot into the room...

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As it was a traditional 'arranged' marriage and she was stepping into a 'joint family' of her newly-wed husband – three younger brothers, one elder brother and their mother – she was very apprehensive about how she will be received, what expectations they will have of her and whether she can live up to their expectations and so on. But then, to her surprise, they turned out to be very easy-going and helped her get quickly used to their way of living.

She had big dreams of having a wonderful, romantic life with Mohan and true to that, he was very loving, romantic and would take her out every evening to a new place in the city and have great fun.

And one day all her dreams came crashing – while returning from office, he met with an accident and died on the spot.

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Ten days have passed since that fateful day and she still hadn't got her moorings; her entire life, lovingly built around Mohan, just was shattered and only memories were left behind. She would just sit the whole day at the window of her room and keep looking out blankly. Her aging mother-in-law, though still reeling under the sudden loss of her second son, would time to time come and lovingly ask her to eat. Finally, after several entreaties, she would just eat a few morsels.

Then one day, one of the younger brothers of Mohan walked in and said, “Vadina! Anyway anna is no more. He has awesome shirts. Let me take them” and took away her husband's shirts, without even asking for her permission. She just sat there helplessly.

A little while later, another of the younger brothers walked in and said, “Vadina! I love anna's Rolex watch! Let me take it” and took it away.

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And now, Mohan's youngest brother walked in and said, “Vadina! I need a bike and anna's new Royal Enfield is just awesome!” and took away the bike keys that were hung behind the door.

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As the sun was setting, she was sitting at the window and looking at the evening golden glow that beautifully reflected on her face.

“Amma, Mandakini!” With a start, she turned around and saw and baava (husband's elder brother) Rangaraju at the door. She frantically looked around the room, searching for any last belongings of Mohan and found her husband's chappals next to the door. She ran and grabbed them and tightly hugged them to her bosom, with fear of loss and absolute determination not to lose the last precious belonging of her husband writ large on her face.

1 'Vadina' in Telugu means elder brother's wife ,looked upon like one's elder sister

Rangaraju said, “Amma! Fear not! I haven't come to take away anything of your beloved husband. I have only come to give you something that I felt will make you happy and keep his memories alive for you. Please take this audio cassette. It has some family conversations that I by chance recorded last year. Mohan had an awesome sense of humour. I hope you will enjoy listening to it.” Saying this, he gently placed the cassette on the teapoy and walked away.

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