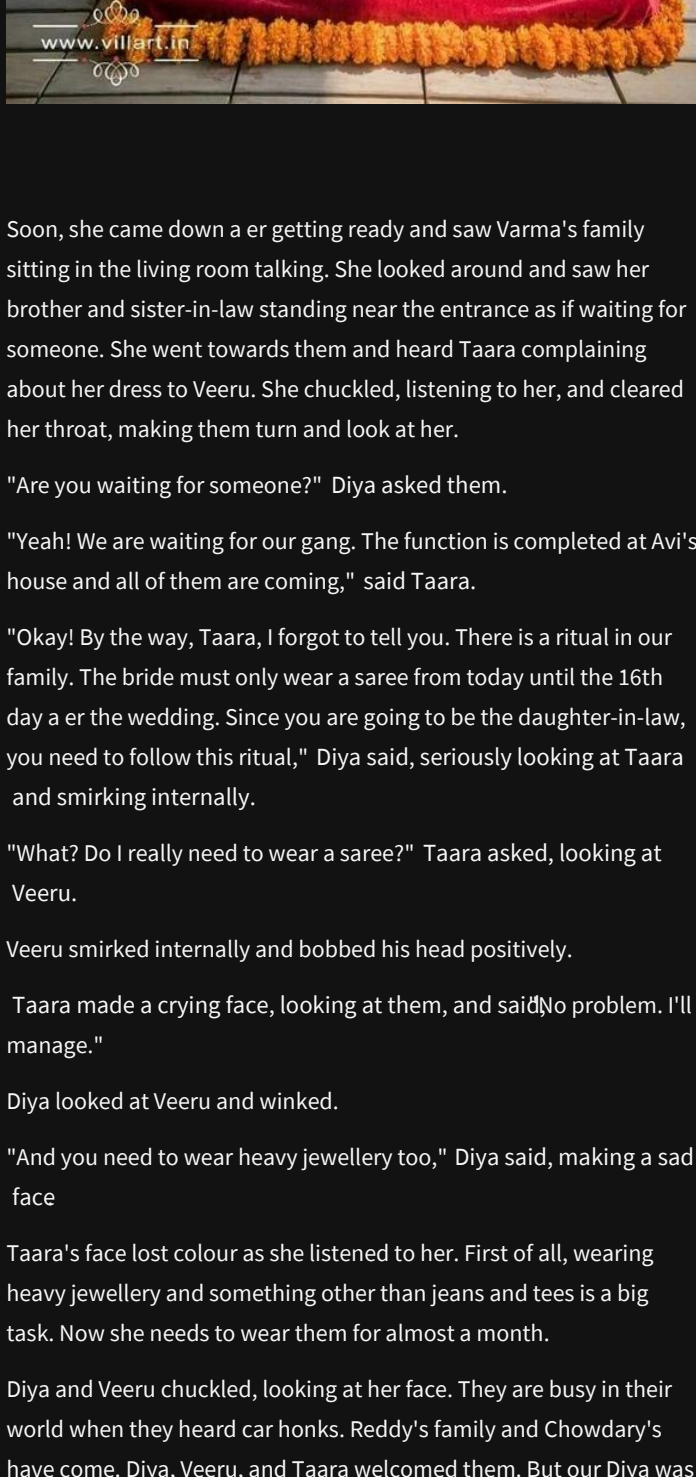


**Author's POV:**

Diya smiled gleefully, looking at the arrangements going on. But she was a bit sad as her Nanu's family hadn't come yet. She knew that her Nani and Nanu wouldn't miss the weddings of their grandchildren. But what about Zaheer Mamu? Will he come? She knew her was closer to Zaheer than Aadil. Though her mother had never shared, she knew her mother's inner turmoil. She sighed and moved to get ready as the Godhuma Rai function was going to start soon.



Soon, she came down a er getting ready and saw Varma's family sitting in the living room talking. She looked around and saw her brother and sister-in-law standing near the entrance as if waiting for someone. She went towards them and heard Taara complaining about her dress to Veeru. She chuckled, listening to her, and cleared her throat, making them turn and look at her.

"Are you waiting for someone?" Diya asked them.

"Yeah! We are waiting for our gang. The function is completed at Avi's house and all of them are coming," said Taara.

"Okay! By the way, Taara, I forgot to tell you. There is a ritual in our family. The bride must only wear a saree from today until the 16th day a er the wedding. Since you are going to be the daughter-in-law, you need to follow this ritual," Diya said, seriously looking at Taara and smirking internally.

"What? Do I really need to wear a saree?" Taara asked, looking at Veeru.

Veeru smirked internally and bobbed his head positively.

Taara made a crying face, looking at them, and said, "No problem. I'll manage."

Diya looked at Veeru and winked.

"And you need to wear heavy jewellery too," Diya said, making a sad face

Taara's face lost colour as she listened to her. First of all, wearing heavy jewellery and something other than jeans and tees is a big task. Now she needs to wear them for almost a month.

Diya and Veeru chuckled, looking at her face. They are busy in their world when they heard car honks. Reddy's family and Chowdary's have come. Diya, Veeru, and Taara welcomed them. But our Diya was waiting for that one person.

"He didn't come," Arpita said, looking at Diya, who was searching for Arjun

Diya's face fell, listening to her. She gave her a small smile and moved inside.

Murthy's and Varma's greeted them. Everyone sat in the living room, talking.

"Shall we start? It's getting late," said Ragini.

"Yeah!!" Janaki said, while looking at the door.

"Is anyone coming?" Meera asked Janaki.

"Yeah! Arjun and his friends are coming," said Janaki.

"We will wait then," said Ragini.

"You guys can start. They will come in 10 minutes," said Gayatri.

Ragini and Raman sat to do Ganesh puja before starting the ritual. They were in the middle of the puja when Arjun came inside with Meera's maternal family and Arjun's friends. Meera's eyes well up with tears as she looks at her mother and father for the first time in a long time. She ran towards them and hugged them tight. Ahmed kissed his daughter's forehead.

"Won't you hug me, Didi?" Zaheer asked, coming inside.

Meera stood rooted in her place, listening to her brother's voice. Diya and Veeru ran into his arms, making him chuckle.

Asma went and hugged Meera and asked, "he/hf/ow are you, bhabhi?"

"I'm good. How are you guys? By the way, where are Rehan and Sameer?" Meera asked Asma.

"They will come a er two days. Sameer is having his internals, so, both of them will come together on the day a er tomorrow," said Asma.

"You guys can talk later. It's getting late. Razia, you are their grandmother. Go and start the ritual with Ragini and Laxmi," said Razda.

Razia smiled, and nodded her head.

(Okay, let me remind you again,

Veeru and Diya's paternal grandparents are Raman Murthy and Ragini.

Ahmed and Razia are Veeru and Diya's maternal grandparents.

Taara and Surya's paternal grandparents are Janardhan Varma and Laxmi.

Yash's maternal grandparents are Raghu Ram Reddy and Radha.

Avinav's paternal grandmother is Gayatri.)

The Godhuma Rai ceremony is one of the important ceremonies in a Telugu marriage. It marks the start of the wedding festivities. The ceremony will start with Ganesh puja, followed by o ering coconut and thambulam to the grinding stone. Later, five elderly ladies grind the dried turmeric roots in the grinding stone into a fine powder, which is preserved for later. This powder is used to apply to the bride and the groom in the "Pellikukururu/Pellikudokuru ceremony". A er the Godhuma Rai ceremony, both the bride and groom's family start the wedding planning and preparations.

Soon, the ceremony was completed. Meera introduced her family to the Varma's as they didn't know much about them.

"Beta, come here," Razia called to Taara.

Taara went and sat beside her. Zaheer brought a box and handed it to Taara.

"This jewellery was designed by my elder granddaughter, Azira. She designed them especially for Veeru's bride. So, I'm handing them to you," Razia said, caressing the jewellery with love

Taara looked at Veeru, who gestured for her to take them. Razia smiled, looking at them.

"Thank you, Dadi," Taara said, smiling at the old lady.

"God bless you, beta," Ahmed and Razia blessed her.

Meera, Sakshi, Niranjana, Asma, and Janaki were in the kitchen looking a er the lunch arrangements. Zaheer went inside the kitchen and looked for his sister, who was busy talking with Asma and Janaki.

Sakshi, who noticed Zaheer standing at the entrance, asked him "Do you need something, Zaheer?"

"Umm, no bhabhi. I just came to drink water," said Zaheer.

Asma smiled at her husband and blinked her eyes in assurance.

"Bhabhi, can you call Rehan and inform him that we have reached? He said that he wanted to talk with you," said Asma.

Meera nodded her head, and moved out of the kitchen. Meera was talking with Rehan while standing in the garden when Zaheer cleared his throat.

"Rehan, I think your Dadda wants to talk to you," said Meera.

"Di, I want to talk with you, not with him," said Zaheer.

"So, you remember that you have a sister?" Meera asked, looking at him painfully.

Zaheer lowered his head, listening to her and said, "I'm sorry, Didi. I thought I would lose you too if I stay close to you."

Meera sighed, listening to him, and said, "Didn't you forget his words till now? Zaheer, how many times do we have to tell you? You have nothing to do with the deaths of Chacha-Chachi or Ananth and Aadil bhaiyya. He was jealous that you got the love of parents, while he didn't. Zaheer, did I dj erminate between you and Aadil bhaiyya at any point? Both of you are my brothers, and I don't care what the world says about you. You could have talked to me, Zaheer. It's been eight years since you talked with me. Do you know how much I missed you?"

Zaheer pulled her into a tight hug and said, "I'm sorry, Didi."

"We will talk about this later. Now, go and handle your nephew and niece. I forgot to ask you what you think about Arjun and Taara," Meera asked him.

"Arjun is perfect for my crazy girl. And about Taara, I don't know much about her, but I've heard a lot about her from Rehan and Sameer. I know that a er Azira's death, he was the one who was shattered the most. He had hidden himself somewhere and put on a mask. But now seeing his old self is definitely a good sign," said Zaheer.

"Mamu, where are you?" Diya and Veeru shouted together.

"Go fast, otherwise they will take the entire house on their heads," Meera said, chuckling.

Zaheer smiled and le from there.

"Mamu, meet my friend, Aura," Diya said, carrying a jumping Aura in her hands.

"First take that thing from here. At least let me live in peace for these 10 days," Veeru said, making an irritated face.

"A er 10 days, she will come with me. So, let her enjoy here for these 10 days," said Diya, arguing with him.

"Stop it, both of you. Even kids are better than both of you. And Veeru, a er 10 days, she is no longer going to be Diya Murty. She will be Mrs. Diya Arjun Reddy. I know we will think that nothing changes in the relationship of a brother and sister a er a marriage. But it's not going to be the same. With the responsibilities, you can't spend time together like before. Didi is closer to me than Bhaiyya. We had a lot of memories together. But a er her marriage, things did change. I used to miss her a lot. Mostly, our late night talks, our secret ice-cream dates, and our cooking time in the kitchen. She was the one who brought me out of the trauma when my parents passed away in an accident. She and Bhaiyya stood by my side when my Ammi's family blamed me for their death as they were going home a er seeing my badminton match. They held my hand when my brother cursed me. My Nani and Nanu adopted my brother, but they didn't even look at me. Your Nana and Nani were my bade papa and badi maa. They adopted me and gave me a life. When everyone called me a bad omen, they called me their lucky charm. No matter what, never leave your sister's hand," Razia said, becoming emotional.

"Mamu," Diya and Veeru hugged them.

"By the way, did you like the surprise?" Zaheer asked them.

"Yes!! We thought that you wouldn't come," said Veeru.

"Then the credits go to your better-halfes," said Zaheer.

"Taara?" said Veeru.

"Arjun?" said Diya.

"Yes! They came to Mumbai yesterday and talked to me. They made me realise that I was wrong. You are really lucky to have them as partners," Zaheer said, looking at Taara and Arjun, who were talking with Arpita and Yash.

Veeru and Diya had sweet smiles playing on their lips.

"Okay, I need to go. We will talk later", Zaheer said, patting their backs.

Veeru and Diya went towards Taara and Arjun and dragged their respective partners with them.

**In Diya's room:**

"Oy! Why did you drag me here?" Arjun asked Diya.

"Thank you so much, Jun. You don't know how happy I'm. Not only me, but also Amma and Anna. I can't thank you and Taara enough." Saying that, she kissed his cheeks, making him freeze.

He came out of his trance and asked her "You are happy, right?"

Diya bobbed her head cutely.

"Then I can do anything for your happiness. That smile of yours lits up my world," Arjun said, kissing her forehead.

Diya gave him a bright smile and asked him "But how did you convince him? And when did you and Taara go to Mumbai?"

"Well, we planned to go and meet Zaheer uncle a long time ago. But we didn't get time. So, yesterday we went to Mumbai in our private chopper. We talked with him and he got convinced. We came early in the morning along with them. We dropped them at Arjun's house and I went to pick them up while coming here," said Arjun.

"I'm curious as to what you discussed with him," Diya asked him.

Flashback:

Ahmed, Razia, and Asma were sitting in their living room sadly as Zaheer refused to come to the wedding.

"Ammi, why don't you talk to him once again?" Asma asked Razia.

"Didn't you see his stubbornness, Asma? We are also not happy with his decision. We are stuck. On one hand, it's Meera, and on the other hand, it's Zaheer. I don't know why he is hurting us and himself." Razia said, sighing.

They were lost in their world when they heard the continuous ringing of the door bell.

Asma went to open the door and saw Arjun and Taara standing there.

"Can we come inside, chachi?" Arjun asked Asma.

"Yeah! Come beta," said Asma.

"Hey, sexy! What are you doing?" Arjun said, kissing Razia's cheeks.

"Stop flirting with my wife, young man. I won't mind if you flirt with my granddaughter," Ahmed said, pulling Razia towards him.

"How are you beta?" Razia asked, looking at Taara.

"I'm fine, Dadi. How are you all?" Taara asked them.

"Where is Zaheer chacha?" Arjun asked Asma.

"He is in the study room," said Asma.

"We will go and meet him," said Taara.

"He is not in a good mood, beta," said Razia.

"No problem, Dadi. We will manage," said Arjun.

Arjun and Taara knocked on the study room door.

"Come in," said Zaheer.

Arjun and Taara moved inside and greeted Zaheer.

Zaheer looked at them surprised and said, "Hey, Arjun and Taara! What a pleasant surprise?"

"Chachu, can we talk?" Arjun said, seriously.

Zaheer nodded his head positively and gestured for them to sit. Taara and Arjun sat on the couch opposite to him. Taara looked around and noticed their family photos on the wall, but what caught her attention was the photo on the table. It was a picture of Zaheer, Aadil, and Meera, and Meera was dressed beautifully as a bride.

"Uncle, we came here to invite you to our weddings," said Arjun.

"Arjun, you know, right? I can't come," said Zaheer.

"But why chacha? Why can't you come? Don't you want to see your nephew as a groom? Don't you want to see your little princess who is no more little and going to be someone's queen? Don't you want to be with them on their important day?" Arjun asked him.

"Arjun, please," said Zaheer.

"Uncle, they always saw a father figure in you. I don't know much about you, but I've heard a lot about you from Veeru. There isn't a day when he thinks about you. When Ananth Uncle and Aadil Uncle died, he didn't feel weak. Do you know why? Because he knows that you are there to guide him and show him the right path. Maybe he never realised it out in front of you, but he misses you a lot. I don't know why you are not talking to Attamma and distancing yourself from Veeru and Diya, but I guess there must be a strong reason behind it. See, that photo on your table shows how much you love Attamma and Aadil uncle," said Taara.

"What if something happens to them too?" Zaheer said, slowly, but it was audible to Arjun and Taara.

"Why would something happen to them because of you?" Arjun asked him.

"I'm nothing but a curse to them," Zaheer said, closing his eyes in pain.

"Chachu," Arjun and Taara gasped, as they listened to his words.

"What the hell are you speaking of, Zaheer?" Arjun exclaimed loudly.

"I'm saying the truth. I lost my parents because of me. If they hadn't come to see my match on that day, then they would have been alive. Bhaiyya and Jeeju would have been alive if I hadn't come into their lives. That's why I decided to stay away from my family so that they could be safe," said Zaheer.

Taara and Arjun widened their eyes, listening to his words. They didn't understand what to say.

"Chachu, I lost my mother when I was a five-year-old kid. She died during her labour while giving birth to my little brother. She carried him in her womb even a er knowing that her life was at stake. My father cursed my brother and called him a bad omen, saying that he lost his wife because of him and refused to take a glance at him. But me and my family didn't do that. What was his mistake if my mother died? He was just a child and it was my mother's decision to give birth to him. So, we respected her decision. But, to our bad luck, we lost him too a er a few days because of his health issues. It depends on one's thinking, Uncle. You are not related to their deaths. It was written in their destiny and we couldn't change it," said Taara.

"Chachu, do you really think that Attayya will hold you responsible for Ananth Mavayya's death?" Arjun asked him.

Zaheer shook his head negatively.

"Then? Chachu, her only family and relatives are you guys as your community didn't agree to her marriage with Mavayya. She lost her husband and Aadil Chachu's family. Will she feel happy to do her children's weddings when her brother is absent?" Arjun asked him. He took a deep breath and continued, "The decision is yours, uncle. You are hurting yourself and your family by giving importance to someone's words who is no one to you. So what if they think of you like that? They are blind to see your worth. Don't think about others, just think about yourself. Tell me, one thing, Chachu. Are you happy distancing yourself from your family in these eight years?"

"Chacha, I don't know what exactly happened in the past. But, don't hold yourself responsible for something when you are not related to it. Don't lose your happiness by blaming yourself unnecessarily, because one day you will regret it badly. If you are feeling insecure, then open your heart in front of loved ones. Trust me, you'll definitely feel better," Taara said, holding Zaheer's hands.

Zaheer was lost in his thoughts. Arjun and Taara looked at each other and came out of the study room.

"What happened?" Asma asked them.

"Chachi, go and pack yours and Chacha's bags," Arjun said, holding her hands.

Asma looked at them confused.

"Chachi, trust us. Chachu will definitely come. Now, go and pack quickly. We don't have much time. We need to be there by 5 o'clock," said Taara.

Asma nodded her head and moved to her room.

A er some time, Zaheer came out of his study room and said, "Ammi and Baba, go and pack your bags. We need to leave for my nephew and niece's weddings."

Saying that, Zaheer le for his room. Ahmed, Razia, and Rehan smiled brightly, listening to his words.

"What magic did both of you do that he just got convinced like that?" Rehan asked, coming out of shock.

"That's a secret," Taara said, making Rehan pout.

"Stay happy, kiddos. My grandchildren are extremely fortunate to have partners like you," Ahmed said, smiling.

"No, Dadu. We are blessed to have them in our lives. What do you say, Arjun?" Taara asked Arjun.

"You are right, Taara. In fact, we are lucky to have them as our soul mates," said Arjun, making everyone smile.

Diya hugged him tightly and placed her lips on his, shocking him. She didn't understand how to thank him. So, she was pouring all her love for him into the kiss. She encircled her hands around his neck while he embraced her tightly in her arms.

To be continued.....

To be beautiful means to be yourself.  
 You don't need to be accepted by others.  
 You just need to accept yourself.

Think Nihar Rishi



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