

My mother called me one day into a side room and told me to be prepared to be inspected by a prospective bridegroom. They had a shock at home when I told my people  
 5 that I'd not allow anyone to inspect me as a bride and that I'd rather do the inspection of the groom! They felt outraged and my father's younger brother, my father being too angry to speak to me, took me aside and said:  
 10 "Don't be mad! Don't you know that it's not done?" I replied: "If it is not done, it's better that someone starts doing it now."

"What's the matter with you, my dear, why do you want to spoil<sup>1</sup> your chance of settling  
 15 down<sup>2</sup> in life?" I had to explain that that was not my aim in life. I had other aims. I said I would like to work, rather than be a wife. [...]

I was finally persuaded. I was particularly fond of that uncle and could not brush him aside. I  
 20 decided to go through the ceremony of being viewed and assessed<sup>3</sup>. I had made up my mind that I'd hate the young fellow and discourage him publicly. They decked me<sup>4</sup> in all the jewel-  
 25 lery pieces borrowed from my sister-in-law in the house, diamonds and gold all over my ears, neck, nose, and wrist, and clad me<sup>5</sup> in a heavy sari crackling with gold lace<sup>6</sup>. I felt suffocated with all that stuff over me. I felt sick and felt  
 30 that I was losing my identity. But I bore it all patiently as they fitted me out in the side room, and stood around and exclaimed at how well I looked, and the children gaped and cheered and joked. I hated the whole scene. I was seized



with a feeling that I was in a wrong world, and  
 35 that I was a stranger in their midst<sup>7</sup>. I saw my mother's face beaming with satisfaction and I was irritated at her simplicity. Although I was only thirteen, I had my own notions of what was good for me and what I should do in life.  
 40 Although they admired me, I dreaded to look into the mirror myself. And then they seated me like a doll, and I had to wait for the arrival of the eminent personage with his parents. What a fuss they made when they arrived. It's hard  
 45 to get a bridegroom, and when one is available parents treat him as a hard-won prize.

R.K. Narayan, *The Painter of Signs*, 1976

1. gâcher 2. t'installer 3. évaluée 4. m'ont parée  
 5. m'ont revêtue 6. dentelle 7. parmi eux