



Autumn Love

By BS Murthy

She willed herself to not to check her phone to see if he had replied. It had been about three days now. She hated that she was constantly checking his 'last seen at' status and yes, he had logged in just five minutes ago. Yet she couldn't stop herself. This sinking feeling to find absolutely no communication from him was becoming unbearable, almost tortuous.

And then, just as she sat down in her chair, her phone vibrated. With her heart thudding in her ear, she unlocked her phone and stared at the screen. Finally! It was his message.

But when she opened it and read it, she nearly stopped breathing. She didn't know if he was joking or not. What was this? [*]

'Is it a point of no return?' she thought involuntarily moving to the edge of the chair.

Reading his 'have you forgotten about the castration?' message, she sank into the chair thinking, 'is it a lighthearted joke or as a loaded message?', and for a clue, began to recall the events of the year passed by.

'Oh, how my life had turned on its head when I turned fifty?' she thought in wonderment. 'That's when I immunized my heart against attractions and insulated my life from vacillations! So I believed, didn't I? But when he enamored my heart to give a flirty spin to my life, didn't it dawn upon me that I had only sterilized it for a ritual regimen, and no more. Oh, how his first glance pierced my heart to stir my life that very instant!'

Returning from a temple when she found him alone in the drawing room, she felt as if god had sent his angel to receive her in her own abode. The moment their eyes met, it was as if they began their joint search for a love ground to share, which they had to abandon as her husband entered the scene from behind the curtain.

He was a friend of her husband's childhood pal settled in the States. Having spent the best part of his life there, he came back with his wife for good, leaving their two children, who were US citizens. That was six months

back and they had since settled in Hyderabad, where, incidentally, both her married daughters stayed. As he happened to be in their town alone, to explore some business opportunities there, that evening, he came to call on her husband at their common-friend's behest. Introductions over, as her husband wanted her to prepare some coffee for them; she went into the kitchen with a heavy heart.

'While my missing his sight had understandably irked me, didn't the thought that he too would miss my sight inexplicably hurt me?' she began reminiscing about that dream encounter. 'But then, how the smell of the boiling decoction lifted my spirits for it portended serving him some steamy coffee with my own hands. When he said he never tasted anything better, how I hoped he would leave some dregs for my palate to share his satisfaction. What a disappointment it was seeing him empty the cup and how exhilarated I was when he said he had broken his life-long habit of leaving the dregs. Then, as he was preparing to leave, how depressed I was, but how relieved I was when my husband invited him to visit us again!'

She got up from the chair and as if to walk down the memory lane, she walked up to the compound gate.

'Oh, how that fateful evening changed the autumn tenor of my life!' she went on reminiscing. 'Were it the deities I pray that chose to pave a pathway of love for me? Or was it a case of my prayers gone awry? Before he stirred my heart, how sedate was my life, sterile though? After all, there was no material change after he had entered into it. Neither I did I venture onto his love ground nor did I let him into my sexual sphere. Why should life seem drab now as he cold shouldered me? Why not, won't the change of heart alter the tenor of life? Even the one as dull as mine, well, but it did start on an exciting note for a provincial girl like me.'

She was born to humble parents, who felt increasingly proud of her as she grew up. After all, she turned out to be the small town's beauty and the brains of its academics. When she was eighteen, calf love turned a new leaf in her life. The object of her adoration happened to be the stopgap lecturer from a nearby town. He taught maths alright but the equation was wrong for their marriage as he was doubly aged and twice married. Yet, amidst the protestations from her parents, with her tenacity of love, augmented by obduracy of adventure, she ascended the altar to be led by him to his native town. Her marital life, underscored by her zest for it, though clouded by his thrift, was exemplified by her two cute daughters born in quick succession.

'Didn't his thrift drift towards miserliness soon pushing my life into nothingness.' she began to recollect that phase of her life when her children were growing up. 'Why, as his passion for lovemaking too lost traction, how my life entered into the arena of frustration? Yet I shut my mind to adulterous thoughts, didn't I? But did he stop at that? Why, he did acquire a sense of insecurity as well and how insensibly I imbibed both his vices! Maybe that's why I learnt short-hand as a long handle for my secretarial security. Was it really so? Wouldn't have my own fear of the future bred an

urge for self-preservation in my subconscious mind? Who knows, I might've been.

This story, written for "Write India Campaign of Times of India, 2015" on Preeti Shenoy's prompt [*] is a part of the author's free ebook 'Storied Varied - A book of Short Stories', that can be googled is also available in AuthorsDen