



An End Without An End

By BS Murthy

It is the enigma of life in that death impacts the living in ways varied, so it seems. When I heard she died, well after her death, I was doubly pained. Not that it was any untimely for she lived long enough to become a great-grandmother. Even then, death, after all, is death that is finite. But she made hers, an end without an end, haunting me no end.

So to say, born not long apart, we became close neighbours, that was in our late teens. Besides being pretty and lively, she had grace and poise. Yet I was not drawn to her as I was infatuated with someone by then, say in calf-love. Hence, not to mention her nuanced advances, I was even blind to her come-hither looks. But soon enough, as she laid bare her heart to me, I was insensibly impacted by the warmth of her love. So, with her craving for me crushing my crush for the other, I began seeing her passion in the light of her love, and that enhanced mine own ardour for her. Soon thus, the physics of proximity abetted by the chemistry of intimacy pushed us into a secretive courtship, of necking and pecking. Even therein, we refrained from crossing the threshold of chastity, ahead of the nuptial night that we thought was in the offing.

However, given the nearness of our births, when she became marriageable, I was still some way from obtaining my degree, and far off from becoming an eligible bachelor. So, when her father wanted her to don the bridal attire, she bought time, on one pretext or the other, for quite some time. Eventually though, as he would have no more of her excuses, and as there was no way I could seek her hand from him, she urged me to somehow find a way out for us to tie the knot. But then, my family was in no financial position to man our marital burden and I too had no means to stop her dad from stalling his move. Thus, in spite of her support, as I found myself unequal to the task on hand,

she felt that I did not want her enough to have her as wife, the hallmark of love. Maybe, she had our elopement in mind, but all the same, she may be justified in believing that I dithered at the goalpost for I was more of her lover than she was my beloved. Then, probably on the rebound, she married a not so remarkable man, and as if to show me my altered place in her life, she pictured me to him as a 'distant' relative.

But when we met some four years later, though she appeared feisty, yet I could discern in her an element of disconcert that she wryly put it as her life's course correction. Even so, as if to put her on a lively path, her old flame got aflame, making her uninhibited in her affection and flirtatious in her attention. Though her allure furthered my desire, not wanting to compromise her position, I resisted myself from yielding, hard though it was. Needless to say, the premise I have heard that 'even as gentlemen remain cold to their old flames, blaggards seek to inflame them', stood me in good stead then. But for her part, I never knew if she mistook my moral distancing from her as a reconfirmation of my disregard for her emotions. Now seeing all that in hindsight and going by the Bard's word that 'virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied, and vice sometime by action dignified', I should've rather given in. But then, it's our natures that tend to dictate the courses of our lives.

Whatever, as if not to push us any farther into the tempting arena of human frailties, life had kept us locationally apart till well past our prime, by when passions tend to pale into nostalgias. So, when it brought us back into its reckoning, lo as residents of the same town, though as an abundant precaution, it had ensured that we came together only in our family get-togethers. Moreover, as if to make us stick to its nondescript script, her man tended to monopolize my attention for his tedious monologues, leaving us no scope to reminisce our past intimacies. Thus, as our formal meetings too becoming boring moments, I had no incentive left to make it to her place. More so, as she too showed no inclination for our private interaction, in time, our meets got limited to family functions that were far and few between. Besides, so as not to give her man any cause for misapprehension, as I kept myself away from any telephonic contact with her, we became neither here nor there things for far too long.

Thus, some six months back, when I was away in another town, as her name flashed on my cell screen, I reached for her call in all anticipation only to find it fall through, followed by my return call as well. Though I sensed that something could be amiss in her aborted attempt to contact me, yet I failed to get to her to enquire, even after I was back in town that is. No denying all that stirred me from my stupor, but sadly, my lethargy stopped me from responding. Even so, I tended to think about her more than ever before, but somehow by then, truth to tell, I lacked the zeal to make it to her place. And as for her, the proof is in the pudding itself, so I thought. Oh, whither gone our urges that used to make us cling together with no heart to part; well it's

as if our flame of passion got extinguished without a trace for any follow up by us.

In that setting, as I heard about her demise, after a prolonged illness at that, it seemed like the proverbial slip between the cup and the lip, of my troubled conscience. When it slowly sunk in that even the inkling of death failed to induce in her an urge to see, and be seen by me, for one last time, I was at a loss with myself. But then, why it had to end without an end? Had she become averse to me, believing that I was cold-hearted for my failure to visit her after her tentative phone call that she herself aborted? Or, could it be the case of her brewing resentment against me that boiled over at the near end of her life? Why, she did tell me after our breakup that her life won't be what she imagined it would be with me. Though I took that as a boilerplate reaction in that situation, going by her life-long reticence, it turned out to be prophetic, as vouched even by her man! That being the case, maybe her reminiscences of things past came alive to rake up her twice bitten wounds, goading her to have the last laugh at me over her cold shoulder, to make me seem her nobody in the end. Oh me, but is it not hard to believe that she would have really wanted me to go through my last days with that sickening thought.

But, how am I to know what had transpired in her troubled head towards the end? Maybe, as and when I bump into her over there, provided she cares to reveal, that too if she had left her bitterness here behind her. But then, having ignored her all the while, when she was alive, why, after her death, am I perturbed about her indifference to me towards her end? It's as if, more than her pitiable death, that's what it was as I have learned, it's my hurt ego that is paining me; so be it, for it implies that I valued her more than either of us ever thought. All said and done, looks like love, in the long run, tends to leave its poetic course to take the prosaic route, and that's the irony of life.