



## Absurd Proposal

By BS Murthy

Though not nonplussed at having lost her virginity, Nithya, nevertheless, began pressuring Vasu for the nuptial. Yet, his assurances to tie the knot made her give him more of her own that was till she felt he was taking it easy. When she began denying him the good time to drive home her point that only made him indignant, she could figure out the consequences of his indifference. Thus, feeling vulnerable, she forced herself to humour him even more furthering his fulfillment all the more. But even as he procrastinated over their nuptial, his seed began to evolve in her womb and things came to a head when she missed her periods.

When confronted with the development, Vasu could dodge no more, and spilled the beans.

"I understand your embarrassment," he began.

"What an understatement!" she said in consternation.

"We shouldn't have jumped the gun."

"It's neither here nor there," she said, worried over his prevarication.

"Why worry," he said taking her hand, "as I'm around still."

"Better you rush to your parents now," she said as her voice reflected her sense of urgency.

"We should get married before my morning sickness shows up."

"Don't I know about that, but...."

"But what?" she interrupted him in alarm.

"Why are you so impatient?"

"Do remember," she said turning apprehensive, "you promised to marry me."

"I'm here to keep my word."

"Then why dilly-dally?"

"Our marriage is not the problem," he said affecting confusion. "The predicament is how to go about it."

"You always sounded confident, didn't you?"

"I am all for marrying you," he said assuming a melancholic pose. "But there are other things in the way. Those that make life what it is."

"What are you trying to convey?" she became nervous.

"I'm too confused for that."

"What confusion?"

"Now I'm trapped between two stools," he said affecting pain. "I can't extricate myself without disturbing either or both. That's my predicament."

"Is it the time to beat around the bush?" she asked in vexation. "Don't you understand my position? Are your parents against our marriage or what?"

"If it were so," he said assuming an air of arrogance, "I would've walked out on them long back and led you to the Registrar's Office straightaway. But my dilemma is different."

"What's that?" she said, perplexed.

"Promise me," he said outstretching his right palm, "you won't take it amiss."

"Oh, tell me," she said brushing his hand aside.

"We've to contend with Prema."

"Who's she?"

"She's my betrothed," he said nonchalantly.

"What!" she exclaimed, unable to believe her ears.

"We were engaged shortly before I met you."

"What do you mean?" she nearly fainted.

"Don't get upset," he said, trying to comfort her, "listen to me fully."

"How could you do this to me?"

"Oh, please listen," he tried to appease her, "I'll explain everything."

"What else can I do now?" she sounded helpless. "After all, haven't I compromised myself?"

"Don't get depressed," he said trying to sound genuine. "I would never swap her for you. I wouldn't do that even with a Helen for sure. Just try to understand my situation."

"I'm confused really."

"Don't be impatient," he said. "We'll sort out things."

"You should've had me," she blurted out, "only after sorting out things."

"Well, I'll explain."

"Does it make any difference to me now?" she said, wearily.

"When I became a probationary officer, Prema was proposed to me," he said, weighing his words as though he was a tutored witness in the court. "It was a dream match, whichever way one may look at it. We got engaged before I came here for the training. How could I have known that you'd come into my life? The moment I saw you, I was lost in love. The day I was sure of your love, I wrote to my father to cancel the engagement."

"What did he say?" she couldn't help enquiring.

"He said it would put him in a spot," he paused as though to let her prepare for the blow to follow. "He said he used the dowry he took to clear the debts. If I go back now, he will be obliged to return the amount and that would push us back into the debt trap all again. What's worse, it would jeopardize our position in the *biradari*. So he pleaded that he be spared all this in his old age. Can't you understand my predicament? I've a balancing act to do now and you can see how hard it is on me as well."

"If anything, it's harder on me, especially with your child in my womb. Its time you realize that," she said spiritedly. "Well, I see a way out. Let's take a loan to return the dowry. I'll

take up a job and help you tighten our belts as well. It's only a matter of time before we come out clean."

"I don't think it's not workable," he said sounding sentimental. "Besides making me feel like a drag on your life that would only bring me back to square one. Didn't I tell you I always felt deprived, being born poor? Being a Class One Officer, I still feel insecure. While our tightened belts would only reinforce my deprived feeling, the debt trap could make me feel all the more insecure. Moreover, when the novelty wears off, I may even perceive you as the cause of my discomfiture. What's worse, our marriage itself could be on the rocks due to domestic discords."

"All that could be true," she said, as he felt relieved. "But, what's the alternative?"

"There is one," he said seemingly in hesitation, "if you could take it."

"Tell me."

"That is, he said, 'if you believe that I am yours first and last.'"

"If not," she said a little relieved, "do you think I would've given myself to you?"

"Prema is stinking rich," he began taking her hand as though to make her a co-conspirator.

"Now I see," she said pulling back in vexation, "why you are ditching me."

"If you think I am marrying her for money," he said seemingly offended, "she is no less a stunner than you."

"Oh, the novelty seems to have worn off already!" she said as sarcastically as she could while trying not to feel helpless. "Why not, haven't you had enough of me already?"

"I'm sorry," he said cajolingly, "I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm just explaining things. Believe me, life for me without you would be like going through the motions. But without wealth it comes to the same in spite of you. Had you come into my life straight away, it would've been like living in heaven in your wifely fold. But this turn of events gave me the opportunity of my life that is hard to miss. And hadn't you come into my life, I would've been happy still, living with her, unaware of what fulfillment could really be with a woman. To be or not to be, that's my dilemma."

"Better realize that you can't have the cake and eat it too," she said as she readied herself to force the issue. "You've to take your pick, now and here. Well, as you have made your inclinations apparent, I won't bank upon your love anyway. I can only appeal to your conscience, that too because of my condition. If only I were not carrying, seeing how you are dodging, I would've walked out on you by now. Now I know what a woman loses by compromising herself. Anyway, it's too late in the day for me to think of it."

"I know you're hurt," he said. "As I understand your vexation, you should also realize I too have my qualms. I've been troubled ever since we've got physically close. That very night I thought of running away from you. But your beauty and my love immobilized me."

"Now that you're satiated," she hissed at him venomously, "why don't you admit it's just lust with you."

"Even if you take it that way," he said, "a lifetime of sex with you won't be enough to quench my thirst for you. And the truth is, I'm passionately in love with you. You know I've got addicted to you, thanks to the ardor of your amour. Without you I would go mad indeed."

"Keeping my fate in balance," she said in agony, "you're killing me with your falsity."

"If you go with my proposal," he said as if to tilt the balance, "everything would turn out fine in the end."

"What's that?" she enquired in spite of herself.

"With your parents' blessings," he said taking her hand, "we'll have a civil marriage."

"What about your parents?"

"We'll keep them out of the loop for a while."

"But why?" she said removing her hand from his.

"It's my idea of our love," he said regaining her hand, "to save our love. In turn, I'll marry Prema without your parents' getting wiser to it. Slowly but steadily, we can prepare her and all, to the reality of our lives."

"What an absurd proposal!" she said in remorse.

"I agree it's unusual," he said disarmingly. "But that suits us admirably."

"I will be a game," she said having read his game in the meantime, "if only you make Prema privy to this plan."

"It's an absurd proposal really."

"Why! Won't it suit you fine, either way?" she said pinning him down. "If she agrees, you would've us both and should she back out, your father needn't return the money. Wouldn't that remove the hurdle to our marriage? You know it would."

"Doubt if it works out that way," he said lacking any conviction in what he said.

"Why don't you admit," she jeered at him, "that you don't want it that way."

"When I'm frank with you," he sounded arguing for a lost case, "I expect a better understanding than that. How do you expect me to tell my betrothed that I've a pregnant lover? But after marriage it would be all so different. Won't the closeness of marriage call for compromises?"

"Now, I understand your method," she said in apparent hatred. "Lure women into bed to make them vulnerable, and then force compromises upon them. You want to make her your wife for money and retain me as your keep to pep up your sex life!"

"If I were as mean as you imagine," he said playing his sincerity card to the hilt, "wouldn't I have married you on the sly?"

"Oh, you're too clever for that," she said in exasperation. "You're no fool to bite more than you can chew. You know you would come to grief fighting on two fronts. So you've hit upon this strategy of smothering me before tackling her. If you can coerce me now, you think you can cajole her later. It calls for an evil genius to come up with such a devious plan."

"Am I expected to take all this rubbish?" he said feigning anger.

"Why, were you to fail with her later," she continued her tirade against him, "you would have me still, won't you? What's more, her money too, for I'm sure you would make some of hers yours without losing any time. And in case you can't sell your idea to me, still you would've a beautiful wife, and all her money. Either way, you know, you would gain more than you can lose. How cleverly you got into a win-win position!"

"You're attributing motives," he said sounding sad, "to a victim of circumstances."

"On the other hand," she said in pain, "you've made me a victim to better your circumstances. Betrothed though, you wormed your way into my life with the idea of making me your keep."

"Do blame me but spare my love," he said affecting distress. "I love you, and I want you forever. I know that you love me too. Don't break our hearts and make life bleak for both of us."

"So much for our love," she said broaching the topic of her embarrassment, "what about your child in my womb?"

"He would be my first born, won't he?"

"You mean the first bastard?" she said in all sarcasm. "Oh, you've determined the sex of our child beforehand! You seem to be cock sure in all you do, don't you?"

"Don't be harsh!" he said taken aback at her resistance. "Didn't I tell you it's time I owned up you up as my wife?"

"What if you fail to keep your word?" she said in vexation. "Won't that leave our child illegitimate and keep me ever your keep?"

"Believe me."

"You mean I should believe you after what all you've done to me?" she said rebelliously. "What if I reject your proposal?"

"Then unfortunately for both of us," he said after a pause, "we've to go our separate ways."

"Well," she said resolutely, "before that see the child goes out of the way."

"Don't be in a hurry," he tried to sound even more persuasive. "What if we make up in the end? Won't we feel sorry then?"

"You know it brooks no delay, don't you?"

"I'm hopeful," he said reaching for her hand, "our love would make us cling together through thick and thin."

"So you want me to let it grow so that I would've nowhere else to go."

"I don't want to lose you if I can help it," he said not giving up. "You may call me mean that way."

"Haven't I got the taste of your meanness already?" she said, "But if you help me get aborted, I may still feel that there is something left to be salvaged in your character."

"I'm still hopeful."

"That's another way of saying that you won't like to pick up the bill," she said sarcastically. "A rupee saved is a rupee earned, isn't it? Who knows about it better than you, a bank officer opting for mercenary marriage?"

"Well, there's a limit even for insulting."

"Thanks for reminding me about the limits," she said unable to control her tears. "Didn't I bring it upon myself by crossing my limits? Had I not given myself to you, you would've found it hard to decide which way to go now. Having given in myself, I've lost my aura, and having had me, you've lost your appetite. Where's the incentive to marry me now?"

"You're cross with me as you've misunderstood me," he said trying to gain control over her. "But don't nurse hatred for me. Our destinies might still bring us together. Won't the intimacy of the old times usher in fresh tidings then? When the dust of your misgivings settles down, I'm sure we won't be able to resist each other any time."

"I would like to forget you in double quick time," she said as she left him in a huff. "How I wish I had never met you at all. Let the devil take you."

As she walked out on him, she was consumed by hatred.

'Why not I kill him and avenge myself?' she thought on her way. 'But that would only ruin my life further and scandalize my family even more. Let him go to hell. I better think about how to get out of this mess.'

As she walked her way home, she turned her attention on self-preservation.

'I've to handle my parents first,' she contemplated. 'They're sure to smell a rat, sooner than later. Better I tell them that he backed out because of parental opposition. Why, they are bound to be disappointed if not shaken. All the same, how their enthusiasm for him surged my own infatuation. Didn't they make it appear as though all was over bar tying the knot? How sad that I got carried away only to end up being pregnant! Oh, how fate has contrived a parental part in my downfall!'

'What a paradox pregnancy for women is,' Nithya thought that night. 'If a married conceives, it's a cause for celebration, but with an unmarried, it's a means of castigation. After all, man doesn't have any bother in this regard, but then, someone has to bell the cat of nature's urge for procreation. At least, he should've got the decency to arrange for the abortion. But the bastard seems to have designs on me into the future as well. He may even resort to blackmail to entrap me all again. Will he ever allow me to live in peace? Oh, what a devil have I courted?'

As she imagined his shadow on her future, she was frightened no end.

'Had I not conceived,' she reasoned, 'it wouldn't have been so tough on me. Well, I wouldn't have made myself as vulnerable to his blackmail later. Won't it pay to take precautions for women in love to save their skin? Why, the hymen would go away anyway but how can any be wiser to the coitus that caused its rupture? Whatever, I've to get on to the table straight away for there is no other way.'

'Is death the only solution to my predicament?' she thought as the hypocrisy of women's chastity seemed an irony to her. 'Oh no, what dreams I had for my life! But, how sour they all turned out to be! And that's another story. Now, before all else, I should get out of this mess. But how am I to go about it? That's the big question! And what of the future threat from him? Well, I would see how to deal with him later, if he ever returns.'

*This is an eponymous episode from the author's third novel 'Crossing the Mirage - Passing through youth' that is a free ebook in the public domain*