

Gift of My First Love by Ranjeet Singh

“We’ll celebrate this day on grand scale.” I heard the joyful words from my parents. It was New Year’s day - my 9th birthday, and a greater cause was the promotion of my father as Deputy Superintendent of Police in Bareilly.

The house was majestic, so was the heart of all my family members. Arrangements began; a few guests from Dad’s office were summoned and as usual the children of my neighborhood also amassed to wish me. A three storied cake was sliced into pieces with the wish, “Happy birthday!”

My friends shook hands and wished. I offered sweets, Cakes and Pastries. There was a sweet little angel aged around five; she approached me last. I stooped down; she put the red mark on my forehead; wore a cute smile on her resplendent face; then raised her hand, unfolded her fingers and put a Five Hundred rupee Note in my hand as a gift. It was something unexpected. No one ever brought gifts for me. They all knew “I don’t accept gifts.” Only my parents had the privilege to accomplish my wishes; none else.

I took the note in my hands and tore it twice into 8 short pieces uttering loudly “I don’t receive gifts from anyone.”

She was shocked; began to weep; turned back and ran away.

There was a little commotion, but soon everything got settled. At night when the guests returned, my mother soothed, “Arsh, you’re not expected to behave like this. You could deny the gift, but you must acknowledge the affection, honor and the spirit of gifting.”

I really felt for her – first time I’d a soft corner for anyone. Two – three days passed, but I couldn’t wipe off the scene from my eyes. It’d some haunting sensations. I wished to see her again though I knew no one would like to interact after that uncivilized demeanor. Children are even more conscious to their self-respect.

Next day, I walked in all the streets of my colony to trace her. With the same excitement, I continued my task the following afternoons and evenings. I felt restless, puzzled and much deep down in my heart. I decided, “If I found her even in the streets, on the roads, in the park or anywhere, I would fall on my knees, regret and beg sorry innumerable times. All my efforts went in vain.

I was down with fever – very high fever. The family doctor visited twice a day, but there was no sign of improvement. My house was opposite to Government Hospital, but they took me to Private.

On the way, I saw that angelic face in school uniform. She was perfectly joyful. In fact, no one could ever feel otherwise but be glad in her jocund company. I knew she wasn’t from my colony. I wanted to reach her, but my car passed her quickly; I couldn’t dare to ask my father stop the car as I’d found the remedy to my fever on the road.

“Mom, I’m feeling perfectly fine” getting up early in the morning I conveyed. “Can I resume my school this morning?”

Mom gave her consent with a broad smile. My school started at 8 in the morning whereas I saw her around 9:30. Hence I kept loitering in the Park near my school. When it was 9:15, I rushed to the place I saw her last day. She was on time. A bevy of little beautiful girls of her age surrounded her. I couldn’t dare to fall on her way and talk to her. I walked fast and passed from her front to opposite side. Luckily, she noticed me in the second effort. I didn’t waste my time – put on a hanged mouth – sad and crestfallen; held both the ears and vibrated my lips saying ‘sorry’. She noticed, but the fury on her face heightened and turned her face from me. I kept walking behind her till she reached her school. I thought – she’d definitely give me a last look, but I was wrong.

I kept repeating my act – bunked school, begged ‘sorry’ three days a week. Doing all this, I often got late. The gatekeeper at few occasions felt for me and took me inside the school. At other times he thought getting late was my usual habit; he frowned and didn’t heed my request. I couldn’t return home before time, so I kept moving near the school gate hiding myself from the passersby.

The school authorities issued notices, letters and many warnings. In PTM I took my uncle and got things settled. Three months had passed; I never reached school on time. Moreover she hadn’t forgiven me either. Later on she stopped even looking at the side I used to stand. Examinations came and got over; I was least bothered about the results. The same year in June, her father was transferred. It added to my misery – confined to my room for months. But things got usual as life gave some other reasons to smile.

Years rolled by; after 12th, I got admission in Banaras Hindu University; got engaged in building up my career; completed Post Graduate in 2008 and enrolled myself in Ph.D. I was lucky enough to qualify NET/JRF the next year. After submitting my thesis in 2011, I got posting in Govt. Degree College as Assistant Professor. Many years had passed, but the mistake of my childhood days was still fresh and haunting. The “sorry” was still vibrating on lips. I collected those torn pieces of 500 rupee note and united them into one whole with the help of gum, fevi-stick and cello-tape. That was the only gift the leaves of my file contained. I still wanted to search that lost face who taught me kindness and love. I spent months looking for her on every social site in fashion those days – Twitter, Facebook, What’s App. When failed, I gave bent to my feelings in poems and two fictions – *I Will Wait For You & Love Happens Only Once*.

Now my parents were worried for my marriage. Every day two-three profiles reached my home with the beautiful photos of bewitching faces. When asked to go through the profiles, I couldn’t convey what my heart actually desired. Finally I opted for one – qualified enough in my subject.

The preparations began. My parents asked me to take leave for the Engagement Ceremony. I was restless; wanted to go in search of that cute face of my school days and beg sorry once more. I didn’t know where to look for; hence I sat down to complete

another fiction – *The Heart of My Life* with a view to finishing it before the day of my marriage. I gave excuse to my family members – “I’ve to attend a Seminar in Kolkata hence unable to come”. They conveyed everything to my in-laws who didn’t want to lose a suitable groom for their daughter by creating nuisance for the trifle reasons.

My marriage day reached, I looked perfectly handsome – the desire of every bride. The sweet memories of that beautiful cute girl of my childhood I left behind and buried my love in the pages of my fiction. I married religiously and took all the oaths from the core of heart; decided not to let any other face enter my life however beautiful she might be. Next morning, in valediction ceremony, tears in In-laws’ eyes moved me and I promised not to hurt their daughter – now my wife.

The car finally reached my home; stopped at the gate. My better-half followed the conventions and rituals; pulled the veil long on her face. A tug of war was going inside her shivering body – caused by the apprehension of forthcoming changes she’d to deal with.

My mother along with my sister-in-laws and other relatives appeared. We stepped down; she was standing beside me, shivering a bit. My mother with all the love in her eyes pulled her veil up to have a view of her pretty daughter-in-law who blushed scarlet at the moment. Though modern and fairly educated, she’d to struggle to screw up her courage. My mother lifted her chin up and she opened her star-like eyes with a pleasant smile.

The next moment her sinews got tightened; wrath entered her eyes from some unknown corner. She looked here and there. The veil went off her head. I couldn’t guess what actually she was looking at. She appeared a bit crazy – to the verge of being called mad.

The ladies got frightened – stared her awkwardly. Having a complete survey of her surroundings and the ladies who surrounded her, she finally looked at me. I noticed some uncanny expressions in her eyes – anger mixed with excitement, depression and many other scary feelings. She raised her finger and asked in a fit of anger.

“You’re the same person who tore my 500 rupee note?”

I was perturbed and fixed to the ground; couldn’t get what to answer. I managed myself and gave a loud peal of laughter. Everyone was amazed and couldn’t comprehend what actually was happening around.

I couldn’t dare to say “Yes” as it might have given impetus to her fury. The red flare in her big eyes was an obvious evidence of the risks and dangers I was destined to meet in future. Many strange things happened that day; she didn’t drop off the fury in her eyes and I couldn’t dare to smile. There was some hubbub in the relatives - “the bride has some neurotic problems.” I’d no mind to mind anything as the circle of my journey was complete now.

Two years have passed, I feel sorry with every wish – good-morning, good-evening and sweet-dreams. She’s not forgiven me even today. I still don’t dare to smile on her face.

But to say it frankly, “she’s the loveliest person in the world; the best friend in life, the heart of my Heart and the source of my inspiration.”

Every day when she looks at me in a pleasant mood, I feel ecstatic and utter these inaudible words, “I love you. Please forgive me. I promise I wouldn’t hurt you ever.”

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